PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 142

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1988-89

COMPRISING PERIOD
22 NOVEMBER—2 DECEMBER 1988

Chronology of "The Parliamentary Debates"

The Parliamentary History contains all that can be collected of the Legislative History of this country from the Conquest to the close of the XVIIIth Century (1803), 36 vols. The chief sources whence these Debates are derived are the Constitutional History, 24 vols.; Sir Simonds D'Ewes' Journal; Debates of the Commons in 1620 and 1621; Chandler and Timberland's Debates, 22 vols.; Grey's Debates of the Commons, from 1667 to 1694, 10 vols.; Almons Debates, 24 vols.; Debrett's Debates, 63 vols.; The Hardwicke Papers; Debates in Parliament by Dr. Johnson, &c. &c.

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES commenced with the year 1803, and the contents are set forth in the following Chronological Table:—

HISTORY

CONQUEST TO 34 GEO. II.—1066 to 1760

Vol. 1 to 15. 1 Will. I to 34 Geo. II
1066-1760

REIGN OF GEO. III.—1760 to 1820

Vol. 15 to 35. Geo. III to 40 Geo. III.
1760—1800

PARLIAMENTS OF UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

(First Parliament)

Vol.	35	41	Geo. III.	1801
—	36	42	—	1802

(Second Parliament)

Vol.	36	42	Geo. III.	1802-3

DEBATES

First Series

(Second Parliament—*cont.*)

Vol.	1 & 2	44	Geo. III.	1803-4
—	3 to 5	45	—	1805
—	6 & 7	46	—	1806

(Third Parliament)

Vol.	8 & 9	47	Geo. III.	1806-7

(Fourth Parliament)

Vol.	9 to 11	48	Geo. III.	1807-8
—	12—14	49	—	1809
—	15—17	50	—	1810
—	18—20	51	—	1810-11
—	21—23	52	—	1812

(Fifth Parliament)

Vol.	24 to 26	53	Geo. III.	1812-13
—	27 & 28	54	—	1813-14
—	29 to 31	55	—	1814-15
—	32—34	56	—	1816
—	35 & 36	58	—	1817
—	37—38	58	—	1818

(Sixth Parliament)

Vol.	39 & 40	59	Geo III.	1819
—	41	60	—	1819-20

Second Series

REIGN OF GEO. IV.—1820 to 1830

(Seventh Parliament)

Vol.	1 to 3	1	Geo. IV.	1820
—	4 & 5	2	—	1821
—	6— 7	3	—	1822
—	8— 9	4	—	1823
—	10—11	5	—	1824
—	12—13	6	—	1825-6
—	14—15	7	—	1826

(Eighth Parliament)

Vol.	16	7	Geo. IV.	1826
—	17	8	—	1827
—	18 & 19	9	—	1828
—	20—21	10	—	1829
—	22 to 25	11	—	1830

Third Series

REIGN OF WILLIAM IV.—1830 to 1837

(Ninth Parliament)

Vol.	1 to 3	1	Will. IV.	1830-1

(Tenth Parliament)

Vol.	4 to 8	2	Will. IV.	1831
—	9—14	3	—	1832

(Eleventh Parliament)

Vol.	15 to 20	4	Will. IV.	1833
—	21—25	5	—	1834

(Twelfth Parliament)

Vol.	26 to 30	6	Will. IV.	1835
—	31—35	7	—	1836
—	36—38	8	—	1837

REIGN OF VICTORIA.—1837 to 1901

(Thirteenth Parliament)

Vol.	39 to 44	1	Victoria	1838
—	45—50	2	—	1839
—	51—55	3	—	1840
—	56—58	4	—	(a)1841

(Fourteenth Parliament)

Vol.	59	4	Victoria	(b)1841
—	60 to 65	5	—	1842
—	66—71	6	—	1843
—	72—76	7	—	1844
—	77—82	8	—	1845
—	83—88	9	—	1846
—	89—94	10	—	(a)1847

(Fifteenth Parliament)

Vol.	95	10	Victoria	(b)1847
—	96—101	11	—	1848
—	102—107	12	—	1849
—	108—113	13	—	1850
—	114—118	14	—	1851
—	119—122	15	—	(a)1852

(Sixteenth Parliament)

Vol.	123	15	Victoria	(b)1852
—	124 to 129	16	—	1853
—	130—135	17	—	1854
—	136—139	18	—	1855
—	140—143	19	—	1856
—	144	20	—	(a)1857

(Seventeenth Parliament)

Vol.	145 to 147	20	Victoria	(b)1857
—	148—151	21	—	1858
—	152 & 153	22	—	(a)1859

(Eighteenth Parliament)

Vol.	154 & 155	22	Victoria	(b)1859
—	156 to 160	23	—	1860
—	161—164	24	—	1861
—	165—168	25	—	1862
—	169—172	26	—	1863
—	173—176	27	—	1864
—	177—180	28	—	1865

(Nineteenth Parliament)

Vol.	181 to 184	29	Victoria	1866
—	185—189	30	—	1867
—	190—193	31	—	1867-8

(Twentieth Parliament)

Vol.	194 to 198	32	Victoria	1868-9
—	199—203	33	—	1870
—	204—208	34	—	1871
—	209—213	35	—	1872
—	214—217	36	—	1873

(Twenty-First Parliament)

Vol.	218 to 221	37	Victoria	1874
—	222—226	38	—	1875
—	227—231	39	—	1876
—	232—236	40	—	1877
—	237—243	41	—	1878
—	242—249	42	—	1878-9
—	250 & 251	43	—	(a)1880

(Twenty-Second Parliament)

Vol.	252 to 256	43	Victoria	(b)1880
—	257—265	44	—	1881
—	266—273	45	—	(a)1882
—	274 & 275	45	—	(b)1882
—	276 to 283	46	—	1883
—	284—292	47	—	1884
—	293—301	48	—	1884-5

(Twenty-Third Parliament)

Vol.	302 to 307	49	Victoria	1886

(Twenty-Fourth Parliament)

Vol.	308 & 309	49	Victoria	(b)1886
—	310 to 321	50	—	1887
—	322—332	51	—	1888
—	333—340	52	—	1889
—	341—348	53	—	1890
—	349—356	54	—	1890-1

Fourth Series

(Twenty-Fourth Parliament—*cont.*)

Vol.	1 to 6	55	Victoria	1892

(Twenty-Fifth Parliament)

Vol.	7	56	Victoria	1892
—	8 to 21	57	—	1893-4
—	22—29	57	—	1894
—	30—35	58	—	1895

(Twenty-Sixth Parliament)

Vol.	36	59	Victoria	1895
—	37 to 44	59	—	1895-6
—	45—52	60	—	1897
—	53—65	61	—	1898
—	66—76	62	—	1899
—	77	63	—	1899
—	78—83	63	—	1900
—	84	63 & 64	—	1900
—	85—87	64	—	1900

(Twenty-Seventh Parliament)

Vol.	88	65	Victoria	1900

REIGN OF EDWARD VII.—1901 to 1910

(Twenty-Seventh Parliament—*cont.*)

Vol.	89	1	Edward VII.	1901
—	90 to 100	1	—	1901
—	101	1 & 2	—	1902
—	102—117	2	—	1902
—	118—128	3	—	1903
—	129—140	4	—	1904
—	141—151	5	—	1905

(Twenty-Eighth Parliament)

Vol.	152 to 168	6	Edward VII.	1906
—	169—182	7	—	1907
—	183—199	8	—	1908

Fifth Series—Official Report

Lords Debates

(Twenty-Eighth Parliament—*cont.*)

Vol.	1 to 4	9	Edward VII.	1909

(Twenty-Ninth Parliament)

Vol.	5 & 6	10	Edward VII. and 1 Geo. V.	1910

Commons Debates

(Twenty-Eighth Parliament—*cont.*)

Vol.	1 to 13	9	Edward VII.	1909

(Twenty-Ninth Parliament)

Vol.	14 to 20	10	Edward VII. and 1 Geo. V.	1910

REIGN OF GEORGE V.—1910 to 1936

Lords Debates

(Thirtieth Parliament)

Vol.	7 to 10	1 & 2	Geo. V.	1911
—	11—13	2—3	—	1912-13
—	14	3—4	—	1913
—	15—17	4—5	—	1914
—	18—20	5—6	—	1914-16
—	21—23	6—7	—	1916
—	24—28	7—8	—	1917
—	29—32	8—9	—	1918

Commons Debates

(Thirtieth Parliament)

Vol.	21 to 33	1 & 2	Geo. V.	1911
—	34— 49	2—3	—	1912
—	50— 57	3—4	—	1913
—	58— 67	4—5	—	1914
—	68— 79	5—6	—	1914-16
—	80— 88	6—7	—	1916
—	89—102	7—8	—	1917
—	103—111	8—9	—	1918

	(THIRTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT)					(THIRTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT)			
Vol.	33 to 38	9 & 10	GEO. V.	1919	Vol.	112 to 124	9 & 10	GEO. V.	1919
—	39—43	10—11	—	1920	—	125—140	10—11	—	1920-21
—	44—47	11—12	—	1921	—	141—148	11—12	—	1921
—	48 (2nd Session)	12	—	1921	—	149 (2nd Session)	12	—	1921
—	49—51	12—13	—	1922	—	150—158	12—13	—	1922
	(THIRTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)					(THIRTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)			
Vol.	52 to 55	13 & 14	GEO. V.	1922-23	Vol.	159 to 168	13 & 14	GEO. V.	1922-23
	(THIRTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)					(THIRTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)			
Vol.	56 to 59	14 & 15	GEO.V.	1924	Vol.	169 to 178	14 & 15	GEO. V.	1924

PARLIAMENT OF UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

	(THIRTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT)					(THIRTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT)			
Vol.	60 to 62	15 & 16	GEO. V.	1924-25	Vol.	179 to 190	15 & 16	GEO. V.	1924-25
—	63—65	16—17	—	1926	—	191—201	16—17	—	1926
—	66—69	17—18	—	1927	—	202—212	17—18	—	1927
—	70 & 71	18—19	—	1928	—	213—221	18—19	—	1928
—	72 to 74	19—29	—	1928-29	—	222—228	19—20	—	1928-29
	(THIRTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT)					(THIRTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT)			
Vol.	75 to 78	20 & 21	GEO. V.	1929-30	Vol.	229 to 243	20 & 21	GEO. V.	1929-30
—	79—82	21—22	—	1930-31	—	244—258	21—22	—	1930-31
	(THIRTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT)					(THIRTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT)			
Vol.	83 to 85	22 & 23	GEO. V.	1931-32	Vol.	259 to 271	22 & 23	GEO. V.	1931-32
—	86—89	23—24	—	1932-33	—	272—282	23—24	—	1932-33
—	90—94	24—25	—	1933-34	—	283—294	24—25	—	1933-34
—	95—98	25—26	—	1934-35	—	295—306	25—26	—	1934-35
	(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT)					(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT)			
Vol.	99	26	GEO. V. and EDWARD VIII.	1935-36	Vol.	307	26	GEO. V.	1935-36

REIGN OF EDWARD VIII.—1936

	Lords Debates					*Commons Debates*			
	(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)					(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)			
Vol.	99 to 102		EDWARD VIII.	1936	Vol.	308 to 316		EDWARD VIII.	1936
—	103		—	1936-37	—	317		—	1936-37

REIGN OF GEORGE VI.—1936 to 1952

	Lords Debates					*Commons Debates*			
	(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)					(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)			
Vol.	104 to 106	1	GEO. VI.	1936-37	Vol.	318 to 327	1	GEO. VI.	1936-37
—	107—110	1 & 2	—	1936-38	—	328—340	1 & 2	—	1937-38
—	111—114	2—3	—	1938-39	—	341—354	2—3	—	1938-39
—	115—117	3—4	—	1939-40	—	355—366	3—4	—	1939-40
—	118—120	4—5	—	1940-41	—	367—375	4—5	—	1940-41
—	121—124	5—6	—	1941-42	—	376—384	5—6	—	1941-42
—	125—129	6—7	—	1942-43	—	385—394	6—7	—	1942-43
—	130—133	7—8	—	1943-44	—	395—405	7—8	—	1943-44
—	134—136	8—9	—	1944-45	—	406—412	8—9	—	1944-45
	(THIRTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT)					(THIRTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT)			
Vol.	137 to 143	9 & 10	GEO. VI.	1945-46	Vol.	413 to 429	9 & 10	GEO. VI.	1945-46
—	144—151	10—11	—	1946-47	—	430—442	10—11	—	1946-47
—	152—158	11—12	—	1947-48	—	443—456	11—12	—	1947-48
—	159—165	12—14	—	1948-49	—	457—471	12—14	—	1948-49
	(THIRTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT)					(THIRTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT)			
Vol.	166 to 168	14	GEO. VI.	1950	Vol.	472 to 479	14	GEO. VI.	1950
—	169—173	14 & 15	—	1950-51	—	480—492	14 & 15	—	1950-51
	(FORTIETH PARLIAMENT)					(FORTIETH PARLIAMENT)			
Vol.	174	15 & 16	GEO. VI. and 1 ELIZ. II.	1951-52	Vol.	493 to 495	15 & 16	GEO. VI. and 1 ELIZ. II.	1951-52

REIGN OF ELIZABETH II.—1952 to

Lords Debates

	(FORTIETH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)		
Vol.	174 to 178	1 ELIZ. II.	1952
—	179—183	1 & 2 —	1952-53
—	184—189	2—3 —	1953-54
—	190—192	3—4 —	1954-55
	(FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	193 to 199	4 & 5 ELIZ. II.	1955-56
—	200—205	5—6 —	1956-57
—	206—211	6—7 —	1957-58
—	212—218	7—8 —	1958-59
	(FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	219 to 225	8 & 9 ELIZ. II.	1959-60
—	226—234	9—10 —	1960-61
—	235—243	10—11 —	1961-62
—	244—252	11—12 —	1962-63
—	253—260	12—13 —	1963-64
	(FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	261 to 269	13 & 14 ELIZ. II.	1964-65
—	270—273	14—15 —	1965-66
	(FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	274 to 285	15 & 16 ELIZ. II.	1966-67
—	286—296	16—17 —	1967-68
—	297—304	17—18 —	1968-69
—	305—310	18—19 —	1969-70
	(FORTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	311 to 324	19 & 20 ELIZ. II.	1970-71
—	325—335	20—21 —	1971-72
—	336—345	21—22 —	1972-73
—	346—349	22—23 —	1973-74
	(FORTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	350 to 353	23 ELIZ. II.	1974
	(FORTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	354 to 365	23 & 24 ELIZ. II.	1974-75
—	366—377	24—25 —	1975-76
—	378—386	25—26 —	1976-77
—	387—395	26—27 —	1977-78
—	396—399	27—28 —	1978-79
	(FORTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	400 to 414	28 & 29 ELIZ. II.	1979-80
—	415—424	29 & 30 —	1980-81
—	425—435	30 & 31 —	1981-82
—	436—442	31 & 32 —	1982-83
	(FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	443 to 456	32 & 33 ELIZ. II.	1983-84
—	457—467	33 & 34 —	1984-85
—	468—481	34 & 35 —	1985-86
—	482—487	35 & 36 —	1986-87
	(FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	488 to 501	36 & 37 ELIZ. II	1987-88

Commons Debates

	(FORTIETH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)		
Vol.	495 to 506	1 ELIZ. II.	1952
—	507—519	1 & 2 —	1952-53
—	520—534	2—3 —	1953-54
—	535—541	3—4 —	1954-55
	(FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	542 to 559	4 & 5 ELIZ. II.	1955-56
—	560—576	5—6 —	1956-57
—	577—593	6—7 —	1957-58
—	594—611	7—8 —	1958-59
	(FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	612 to 628	8 & 9 ELIZ. II.	1959-60
—	629—647	9—10 —	1960-61
—	648—665	10—11 —	1961-62
—	666—683	11—12 —	1962-63
—	684—700	12—13 —	1963-64
	(FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	701 to 719	13 & 14 ELIZ. II.	1964-65
—	720—726	14—15 —	1965-66
	(FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	727 to 752	15 & 16 ELIZ. II.	1966-67
—	753—769	16—17 —	1967-68
—	770—789	17—18 —	1968-69
—	790—802	18—19 —	1969-70
	(FORTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	803 to 824	19 & 20 ELIZ. II.	1970-71
—	825—844	20—21 —	1971-72
—	845—862	21—22 —	1972-73
—	863—869	22—23 —	1973-74
	(FORTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	870 to 879	23 ELIZ. II.	1974
	(FORTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	880 to 900	23 & 24 ELIZ. II.	1974-75
—	901—920	24—25 —	1975-76
—	921—937	25—26 —	1976-77
—	938—956	26—27 —	1977-78
—	957—966	27—28 —	1978-79
	(FORTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	967 to 993	28 & 29 ELIZ. II.	1979-80
—	994—1000	29 & 30 —	1980-81
	Sixth Series		
Vol.	1 to 12	30 ELIZ. II.	1980-81
—	13—30	30 & 31 —	1981-82
—	31—43	31 & 32 —	1982-83
	(FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	44 to 66	32 & 33 ELIZ. II.	1983-84
—	67—85	33 & 34 —	1984-85
—	86—104	34 & 35 —	1985-86
—	105—117	35 & 36 —	1986-87
	(FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	118 to 141	36 & 37 ELIZ. II	1987-88

House of Commons

Alphabetical List of Members

[Returned at the General Election, 11 June 1987]

A

Abbott, Ms. Diane Julie (Hackney North and Stoke Newington)
Adams, Allender Steele (Paisley, North)
Adams, Gerard (Belfast West)
Adley, Robert James (Christchurch)
Aitken, Jonathan William Patrick (Thanet, South)
Alexander, Richard Thain (Newark)
Alison, Rt. Hon. Michael James Hugh (Selby)
Allason, Rupert William Simon (Torbay)
Allen, Graham William (Nottingham, North)
Alton, David Patrick Paul (Liverpool, Mossley Hill)
Amery, Rt.Hon. Harold Julian (Brighton, Pavilion)
Amess, David Anthony Andrew (Basildon)
Amos, Alan Thomas (Hexham)
Anderson, Donald (Swansea, East)
Arbuthnot, James Norwich (Wanstead and Woodford)
Archer, Rt. Hon. Peter Kingsley QC (Warley, West)
Armstrong, Ms. Hilary Jane (North West Durham)
Arnold, Jacques Arnold (Gravesham)
Arnold, Thomas Richard (Hazel Grove)
Ashby, David Glynn (North West Leicestershire)
Ashdown, Jeremy John Durham (Yeovil)
Ashley, Rt. Hon. Jack CH (Stoke-on-Trent, South)
Ashton, Joseph William (Bassetlaw)
Aspinwall, Jack Heywood (Wansdyke)
Atkins, Robert James (South Ribble)
Atkinson, David Anthony (Bournemouth, East)

B

Baker, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Wilfred (Mole Valley)
Baker, Nicholas Brian (Dorset, North)
Baldry, Antony Brian (Banbury)
Banks, Robert George (Harrogate)
Banks, Tony (Newham, North-West)
Barnes, Harold (North-East Derbyshire)
Barnes, Mrs. Rosemary Susan (Greenwich)
Barron, Kevin John (Rother Valley)
Batiste, Spencer Lee (Elmet)
Battle, John Dominic (Leeds, West)
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony Michael (Birmingham, Selly Oak)
Beckett, Mrs. Margaret Mary (Derby, South)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Beith, Alan James (Berwick-upon-Tweed)
Bell, Stuart (Middlesbrough)
Bellingham, Henry Campbell (Norfolk, North West)
Bendall, Vivian Walter Hough (Ilford, North)
Benn, Rt. Hon. Anthony Neil Wedgwood (Chesterfield)
Bennett, Andrew Francis (Denton and Reddish)
Bennett, Nicholas Jerome (Pembroke)
Benyon, William Richard (Milton Keynes)
Bermingham, Gerald Edward (St. Helens, South)
Bevan, Andrew David Gilroy (Birmingham, Yardley)
Bidwell, Sydney James (Ealing, Southall)
Biffen, Rt. Hon. William John (North Shropshire)
Biggs-Davison, Sir John Alec (Epping Forest) *[died, September 1988]*
Blackburn, John Graham (Dudley, West)
Blair, Anthony Charles Lynton (Sedgefield)
Blaker, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Allan Renshaw KCMG (Blackpool, South)
Blunkett, David (Sheffield, Brightside)
Boateng, Paul Yaw (Brent, South)
Body, Sir Richard Bernard Frank Stewart (Holland with Boston)
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas Cosmo (Upminster)
Boothroyd, Miss Betty (West Bromwich, West)
Boscawen, Hon. Robert Thomas MC (Somerton and Frome)
Boswell, Timothy Eric (Daventry)
Bottomley, Peter James (Eltham)
Bottomley, Mrs. Virginia Hilda Brunette Maxwell (South-West Surrey)
Bowden, Andrew MBE (Brighton, Kemptown)
Bowden, Gerald Francis TD (Dulwich)
Bowis, John Crocket OBE (Battersea)
Boyes, Roland (Houghton and Washington)
Boyson, Rt. Hon. Sir Rhodes (Brent, North)
Bradley, Keith John Charles (Manchester, Withington)
Braine, Rt. Hon. Sir Bernard Richard (Castle Point)
Brandon-Bravo, Martin Maurice (Nottingham, South)
Bray, Jeremy William (Motherwell, South)
Brazier, Julian William Hendy (Canterbury)
Bright, Graham Frank James (Luton, South)
Brittan, Rt. Hon. Leon QC (Richmond, Yorks.)
Brooke, Rt. Hon. Peter Leonard (City of London and Westminster, South)
Brown, James Gordon (Dunfermline, East)
Brown, Michael Russell (Brigg and Cleethorpes)
Brown, Nicholas Hugh (Newcastle upon Tyne, East)
Brown, Ronald Duncan McLaren (Edinburgh, Leith)
Browne, John Ernest Douglas Delavalette (Winchester)
Bruce, Ian Cameron (South Dorset)
Bruce, Malcolm Gray (Gordon)
Buchan, Norman Findlay (Paisley, South)
Buchanan-Smith, Rt. Hon. Alick Laidlaw (Kincardine and Deeside)
Buck, Sir Philip Antony Fyson QC (North Colchester)
Buckley, George James (Hemsworth)
Budgen, Nicholas William (Wolverhampton, South-West)
Burns, Simon Hugh McGuigan (Chelmsford)
Burt, Alistair James Hendrie (Bury, North)
Butcher, John Patrick (Coventry, South-West)
Butler, Christopher John (Warrington, South)
Butterfill, John Valentine (Bournemouth, West)

C

Caborn, Richard George (Sheffield, Central)
Callaghan, James (Heywood and Middleton)
Campbell, Ronald (Blyth Valley)

Campbell, Walter Menzies CBE QC (Fife, North-East)
Campbell-Savours, Dale Norman (Workington)
Canavan, Dennis Andrew (Falkirk, West)
Carlile, Alexander Charles QC (Montgomery)
Carlisle, John Russell (Luton, North)
Carlisle, Kenneth Melville (Lincoln)
Carrington, Matthew Hadrian Marshall (Fulham)
Carttiss, Michael Reginald Harry (Great Yarmouth)
Cartwright, John Cameron (Woolwich)
Cash, William Nigel Paul (Stafford)
Chalker, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Lynda (Wallasey)
Channon, Rt. Hon. Henry Paul Guinness (Southend, West)
Chapman, Sydney Brookes (Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher Robert OBE (Southampton, Itchen)
Churchill, Winston Spencer (Davyhulme)
Clark, Hon. Alan Kenneth McKenzie (Plymouth, Sutton)
Clark, David George (South Shields)
Clark, Michael (Rochford)
Clark, Sir William Gibson (Croydon, South)
Clarke, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Harry QC (Rushcliffe)
Clarke, Thomas CBE (Monklands, West)
Clay, Robert Alan (Sunderland, North)
Clelland, David Gordon (Tyne Bridge)
Clwyd, Mrs. Ann (Cynon Valley)
Cohen, Harry Michael (Leyton)
Coleman, Donald Richard CBE (Neath)
Colvin, Michael Keith Beale (Romsey and Waterside)
Conway, Derek Leslie (Shrewsbury and Atcham)
Cook, Francis (Stockton, North)
Cook, Robert Finlayson (Livingston)
Coombs, Anthony Michael Vincent (Wyre Forest)
Coombs, Simon Christopher (Swindon)
Cope, Rt. Hon. John Ambrose (Northavon)
Corbett, Robin (Birmingham, Erdington)
Corbyn, Jeremy Bernard (Islington, North)
Cormack, Patrick Thomas (South Staffordshire)
Couchman, James Randall (Gillingham)
Cousins, James Mackay (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central)
Cox, Thomas Michael (Tooting)
Cran, James Douglas (Beverley)
Critchley, Julian Michael Gordon (Aldershot)
Crowther, Joseph Stanley (Rotherham)
Cryer, George Robert (Bradford, South)
Cummings, John Scott (Easington)
Cunliffe, Lawrence Francis (Leigh)
Cunningham, John Anderson (Copeland)
Currie, Mrs. Edwina (South Derbyshire)
Curry, David Maurice (Skipton and Ripon)

D

Dalyell, Thomas (Linlithgow)
Darling, Alistair Maclean (Edinburgh, Central)
Davies, Rt. Hon. David John Denzil (Llanelli)
Davies, John Quentin (Stamford and Spalding)
Davies, Ronald (Caerphilly)
Davis, David Michael (Boothferry)
Davis, Terence Anthony Gordon (Birmingham, Hodge Hill)
Day, Stephen Richard (Cheadle)
Dean, Sir Arthur Paul (Woodspring)
Devlin, Timothy Robert (Stockton, South)
Dewar, Donald Campbell (Glasgow, Garscadden)
Dickens, Geoffrey Kenneth (Littleborough and Saddleworth)
Dicks, Terence Patrick (Hayes and Harlington)
Dixon, Donald (Jarrow)
Dobson, Frank Gordon (Holborn and St. Pancras)
Doran, Frank (Aberdeen, South)
Dorrell, Stephen James (Loughborough)
Douglas, Richard Giles (Dunfermline, West)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Edinburgh, West)
Dover, Densmore Ronald (Chorley)
Duffy, Albert Edward Patrick (Sheffield, Attercliffe)
Dunn, Robert John (Dartford)
Dunnachie, James Francis (Glasgow, Pollok)
Dunwoody, Hon. Mrs. Gwyneth Patricia (Crewe and Nantwich)
Durant, Robert Anthony Bevis (Reading, West)
Dykes, Hugh John Maxwell (Harrow, East)

E

Eadie, Alexander BEM (Midlothian)
Eastham, Kenneth (Manchester, Blackley)
Eggar, Timothy John Crommelin (Enfield, North)
Emery, Sir Peter Frank Hannibal (Honiton)
Evans, David John (Welwyn Hatfield)
Evans, John (St. Helens, North)
Evennett, David Anthony (Erith and Crayford)
Ewing, Harry (Falkirk, East)
Ewing, Mrs. Margaret Anne (Moray)

F

Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas Hardwick QC (Perth and Kinross)
Fallon, Michael Cather (Darlington)
Farr, Sir John Arnold (Harborough)
Fatchett, Derek John (Leeds, Central)
Faulds, Andrew Matthew William (Warley, East)
Favell, Anthony Rowland (Stockport)
Fearn, Ronald Cyril (Southport)
Fenner, Dame Peggy Edith DBE (Medway)
Field, Barry John Anthony (Isle of Wight)
Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Fields, Terence (Liverpool, Broadgreen)
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey MBE (Hampstead and Highgate)
Fishburn, John Dudley (Kensington) *[By-election, June 1988]*
Fisher, Mark (Stoke-on-Trent, Central)
Flannery, Martin Henry (Sheffield, Hillsborough)
Flynn, Paul Phillip (Newport, West)
Fookes, Miss Janet Evelyn (Plymouth, Drake)
Foot, Rt. Hon. Michael Mackintosh (Blaenau Gwent)
Forman, Francis Nigel (Carshalton and Wallington)
Forsyth, Michael Bruce (Stirling)
Forsythe, Clifford (South Antrim)
Forth, Eric (Mid-Worcestershire)
Foster, Derek (Bishop Auckland)
Foulkes, George (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
Fowler, Rt. Hon. Peter Norman (Sutton Coldfield)
Fox, Sir John Marcus MBE (Shipley)
Franks, Cecil Simon (Barrow and Furness)
Fraser, John Denis (Norwood)
Freeman, Roger Norman (Kettering)

French, Douglas Charles (Gloucester)
Fry, Peter Derek (Wellingborough)
Fyfe, Mrs. Maria (Glasgow, Maryhill)

G

Galbraith, Samuel Laird (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)
Gale, Roger James (North Thanet)
Galloway, George (Glasgow, Hillhead)
Gardiner, George Arthur (Reigate)
Garel-Jones, William Armand Thomas Tristan (Watford)
Garrett, John Laurence (Norwich, South)
Garrett, William Edward (Wallsend)
George, Bruce Thomas (Walsall, South)
Gilbert, Rt. Hon. John William (Dudley, East)
Gill, Christopher John Fred RD (Ludlow)
Gilmour, Rt. Hon. Sir Ian Hedworth John Little (Chesham and Amersham)
Glyn, Dr. Alan ERD (Windsor and Maidenhead)
Godman, Norman Anthony (Greenock and Port Glasgow)
Golding, Mrs. Llinos (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
Goodhart, Sir Philip Carter (Beckenham)
Goodlad, Alastair Robertson (Eddisbury)
Goodson-Wickes, Dr. Charles (Wimbledon)
Gordon, Mrs. Mildred (Bow and Poplar)
Gorman, Mrs. Theresa Ellen (Billericay)
Gorst, John Michael (Hendon, North)
Gould, Bryan Charles (Dagenham)
Gow, Ian Reginald Edward TD (Eastbourne)
Gower, Sir Herbert Raymond (Vale of Glamorgan)
Graham, Thomas (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde)
Grant, Bernard Alexander Montgomery (Tottenham)
Grant, Sir John Anthony (South-West Cambridgeshire)
Greenway, Harry (Ealing, North)
Greenway, John Robert (Ryedale)
Gregory, Conal Robert (York)
Griffiths, Sir Eldon Wylie (Bury St. Edmunds)
Griffiths, Nigel (Edinburgh, South)
Griffiths, Peter Harry Steve (Portsmouth, North)
Griffiths, Winston James (Bridgend)
Grist, Ian (Cardiff, Central)
Grocott, Bruce Joseph (The Wrekin)
Ground, Reginald Patrick QC (Feltham and Heston)
Grylls, William Michael John (North-West Surrey)
Gummer, Rt. Hon. John Selwyn (Suffolk, Coastal)

H

Hamilton, Hon. Archibald Gavin (Epsom and Ewell)
Hamilton, Mostyn Neil (Tatton)
Hampson, Keith (Leeds, North-West)
Hanley, Jeremy James (Richmond and Barnes)
Hannam, John Gordon (Exeter)
Hardy, Peter (Wentworth)
Hargreaves, Andrew Raikes (Birmingham, Hall Green)
Hargreaves, Joseph Kenneth (Hyndburn)
Harman Ms. Harriet Ruth (Peckham)
Harris, David Anthony (St. Ives)
Haselhurst, Alan Gordon Barraclough (Saffron Walden)
Hattersley, Rt. Hon. Roy Sydney George (Birmingham, Sparkbrook)
Hawkins, Christopher James (High Peak)
Hayes, Jeremy Joseph James (Harlow)
Hayhoe, Rt. Hon. Sir Bernard John (Brentford and Isleworth)
Haynes, David Francis (Ashfield)
Hayward, Robert Antony (Kingswood)
Healey, Rt. Hon. Denis Winston CH MBE (Leeds, East)
Heath, Rt. Hon. Edward Richard George MBE (Old Bexley and Sidcup)
Heathcote-Amory, David Philip (Wells)
Heddle, Bentley John (Mid-Staffordshire)
Heffer, Eric Samuel (Liverpool, Walton)
Henderson, Douglas John (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North)
Heseltine, Rt. Hon. Michael Ray Dibdin (Henley)
Hicks, Mrs. Maureen Patricia (Wolverhampton, North-East)
Hicks, Robert Adrian (South-East Cornwall)
Higgins, Rt. Hon. Terence Langley (Worthing)
Hill, Stanley James Allen (Southampton, Test)
Hinchliffe, David Martin (Wakefield)
Hind, Kenneth Harvard (West Lancashire)
Hogg, Hon. Douglas Martin (Grantham)
Hogg, Norman (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth)
Holland, Stuart Kingsley (Vauxhall)
Holt, James Richard (Langbaurgh)
Home Robertson, John David (East Lothian)
Hood, James (Clydesdale)
Hordern, Sir Peter Maudslay (Horsham)
Howard, Michael, QC (Folkestone and Hythe)
Howarth, Alan Thomas, CBE (Stratford-on-Avon)
Howarth, George Edward (Knowsley, North)
Howarth, James Gerald Douglas (Cannock and Burntwood)
Howe, Rt. Hon. Sir Richard Edward Geoffrey QC (East Surrey)
Howell, Rt. Hon. David Arthur Russell (Guildford)
Howell, Rt. Hon. Denis Herbert (Birmingham, Small Heath)
Howell, Ralph Frederic (North Norfolk)
Howells, Geraint Wyn (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North)
Hoyle, Eric Douglas Harvey (Warrington, North)
Hughes, John (Coventry, North-East)
Hughes, Robert Gurth (Harrow, West)
Hughes, Robert (Aberdeen, North)
Hughes, Royston John (Newport, East)
Hughes, Sean Francis (Knowsley, South)
Hughes, Simon Henry Ward (Southwark and Bermondsey)
Hume, John (Foyle)
Hunt, David James Fletcher, MBE (Wirral, West)
Hunt, John Leonard (Ravensbourne)
Hunter, Andrew Robert Frederick (Basingstoke)
Hurd, Rt. Hon. Douglas Richard, CBE (Witney)

I

Illsley, Eric Evelyn (Barnsley, Central)
Ingram, Adam Paterson (East Kilbride)
Irvine, Michael Fraser (Ipswich)
Irving, Charles Graham (Cheltenham)

J

Jack, John Michael (Fylde)
Jackson, Robert Victor (Wantage)
Janman, Timothy Simon (Thurrock)
Janner, Hon. Greville Ewan QC (Leicester, West)
Jessel, Toby Francis Henry (Twickenham)
John, Brynmor Thomas (Pontypridd)
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey (Wealden)
Johnston, Sir David Russell (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber)
Jones, Gwilym Hadyn (Cardiff, North)
Jones, Ieuan Wyn (Ynys Môn)
Jones, Martyn David (Clwyd, South-West)
Jones, Robert Brannock (West Hertfordshire)
Jones, Stephen Barry (Alyn and Deeside)
Jopling, Rt. Hon. Thomas Michael (Westmorland and Lonsdale)

K

Kaufman Rt. Hon. Gerald Bernard (Manchester, Gorton)
Kellett-Bowman Dame Mary Elaine (Lancaster)
Kennedy Charles Peter (Ross, Cromarty and Skye)
Key, Simon Robert (Salisbury)
Kilfedder, James Alexander (North Down)
King, Rt. Hon. Thomas Jeremy (Bridgwater)
King, Roger Douglas (Birmingham, Northfield)
Kinnock, Rt. Hon. Neil Gordon (Islwyn)
Kirkhope Timothy John Robert (Leeds, North-East)
Kirkwood, Archibald Johnstone (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
Knapman, Roger Maurice (Stroud)
Knight, Gregory (Derby, North)
Knight, Dame Joan Christabel Jill DBE (Birmingham, Edgbaston)
Knowles, Michael (Nottingham, East)
Knox, David Laidlaw (Staffordshire, Moorlands)

L

Lambie, David (Cunninghame, South)
Lamond, James Alexander (Oldham, Central and Royton)
Lamont, Rt. Hon. Norman Stewart Hughson (Kingston upon Thames)
Lang, Ian Bruce (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale)
Latham, Michael Anthony (Rutland and Melton)
Lawrence, Ivan John QC (Burton)
Lawson, Rt. Hon. Nigel (Blaby)
Leadbitter, Edward (Hartlepool)
Lee, John Robert Louis (Pendle)
Leigh, Edward Julian Egerton (Gainsborough and Horncastle)
Leighton, Ronald (Newham, North-East)
Lennox-Boyd, Hon. Mark Alexander (Morecambe and Lunesdale)
Lester, James Theodore (Broxtowe)
Lestor, Miss Joan (Eccles)
Lewis, Terence (Worsley)
Lightbown, David Lincoln (South-East Staffordshire)
Lilley, Peter Bruce (St. Albans)
Litherland, Robert Kenneth (Manchester, Central)
Livingstone, Kenneth Robert (Brent, East)
Livsey, Richard Arthur Lloyd (Brecon and Radnor)
Lloyd, Anthony Joseph (Stretford)
Lloyd, Sir Ian Stewart (Havant)
Lloyd, Peter Robert Cable (Fareham)
Lofthouse, Geoffrey (Pontefract and Castleford)
Lord, Michael Nicholson (Central Suffolk)
Loyden, Edward (Liverpool, Garston)
Luce, Rt. Hon. Richard Napier (Shoreham)
Lyell, Sir Nicholas Walter QC (Mid-Bedfordshire)

M

McAllion, John (Dundee, East)
McAvoy, Thomas (Glasgow, Rutherglen)
McCartney, Ian (Makerfield)
McCrea, Rev Robert Thomas William (Mid-Ulster)
McCrindle, Robert Arthur (Brentwood and Ongar)
McCusker, James Harold (Upper Bann)
MacDonald, Calum Alastair (Western Isles)
McFall, John (Dumbarton)
Macfarlane, Sir David Neil (Sutton and Cheam)
McGrady, Edward Kevin (South Down)
MacGregor, Rt. Hon. John Roddick Russell OBE (South Norfolk)
McKay, Allen (Barnsley, West and Penistone)
MacKay, Andrew James (East Berkshire)
McKelvey, William (Kilmarnock and Loudoun)
Maclean, David John (Penrith and The Border)
McLeish, Henry Baird (Fife, Central)
Maclennan, Robert Adam Ross (Caithness and Sutherland)
McLoughlin, Patrick Allen (West Derbyshire)
MacNair-Wilson, Patrick Michael Ernest David (New Forest)
McNair-Wilson, Sir Robert Michael Conal (Newbury)
McNamara, Joseph Kevin (Kingston upon Hull, North)
McTaggart, Robert (Glasgow, Central)
McWilliam, John David (Blaydon)
Madden, Maxwell Francis (Bradford, West)
Madel, William David (South-West Bedfordshire)
Maginnis, Kenneth (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Mahon, Mrs. Alice (Halifax)
Major, Rt. Hon. John (Huntingdon)
Malins, Humfrey Jonathan (Croydon, North-West)
Mallon, Seamus (Newry and Armagh)
Mans, Keith Douglas Rowland (Wyre)
Maples, John Cradock (Lewisham, West)
Marek, Dr. John (Wrexham)
Marland, Paul (West Gloucestershire)
Marlow, Antony Rivers (Northampton, North)
Marshall, David (Glasgow, Shettleston)
Marshall, James (Leicester, South)
Marshall, John Leslie (Hendon, South)
Marshall, Robert Michael (Arundel)
Martin, David John Pattison (Portsmouth, South)
Martin, Michael John (Glasgow, Springburn)
Martlew, Eric Anthony (Carlisle)
Mates, Michael John (East Hampshire)
Maude, Francis Anthony Aylmer (North Warwickshire)
Mawhinney, Brian Stanley (Peterborough)
Maxton, John Alston (Glasgow, Cathcart)

Maxwell-Hyslop, Robert John (Tiverton)
Mayhew, Rt Hon. Sir Patrick Barnabas Burke QC (Tunbridge Wells)
Meacher, Michael Hugh (Oldham, West)
Meale, Joseph Alan (Mansfield)
Mellor, David John QC (Putney)
Meyer, Sir Anthony John Charles (Clwyd, North-West)
Michael, Alun Edward (Cardiff, South and Penarth)
Michie, Mrs. Janet Ray (Argyll and Bute)
Michie, William (Sheffield, Heeley)
Millan, Rt. Hon. Bruce (Glasgow, Govan) *[Resigned, October 1988]*
Miller, Sir Hilary Duppa (Bromsgrove)
Mills, Iain Campbell (Meriden)
Miscampbell, Norman Alexander QC (Blackpool, North)
Mitchell, Andrew John Bower (Gedling)
Mitchell, Austin Vernon (Great Grimsby)
Mitchell, Sir David Bower (North-West Hampshire)
Moate, Roger Denis (Faversham)
Molyneaux, Rt. Hon. James Henry (Lagan Valley)
Monro, Sir Hector Seymour Peter A.E. (Dumfries)
Montgomery, Sir William Fergus (Altrincham and Sale)
Moonie, Dr. Lewis George (Kirkcaldy)
Moore, Rt. Hon. John Edward Michael (Croydon, Central)
Morgan, Hywel Rhodri (Cardiff, West)
Morley, Elliot Anthony (Glanford and Scunthorpe)
Morris, Rt. Hon. Alfred (Manchester, Wythenshawe)
Morris, Rt. Hon. John QC (Aberavon)
Morris, Michael Wolfgang Laurence (Northampton, South)
Morrison, Hon. Sir Charles Andrew (Devizes)
Morrison, Rt. Hon. Peter Hugh (City of Chester)
Moss, Malcolm Douglas (North-East Cambridgeshire)
Mowlam, Ms. Marjorie (Redcar)
Moynihan, Hon. Colin Berkeley (Lewisham, East)
Mudd, William David (Falmouth and Camborne)
Mullin, Christopher John (Sunderland, South)
Murphy, Paul Peter (Torfaen)

N

Neale, Gerrard Anthony (North Cornwall)
Needham, Richard Francis (North Wiltshire)
Nellist, David John (Coventry, South East)
Nelson, Richard Anthony (Chichester)
Neubert, Michael Jon (Romford)
Newton, Rt. Hon. Antony Harold OBE (Braintree)
Nicholls, Patrick Charles Martyn (Teignbridge)
Nicholson, David John (Taunton)
Nicholson, Miss Emma Harriet (Torridge and West Devon)

O

Oakes, Rt. Hon. Gordon James (Halton)
O'Brien, William (Normanton)
O'Neill, Martin John (Clackmannan)
Onslow, Rt. Hon. Cranley Gordon Douglas (Woking)
Oppenheim, Phillip Anthony Charles Lawrence (Amber Valley)
Orme, Rt. Hon. Stanley (Salford, East)
Owen, Rt. Hon. Dr. David Anthony Llewellyn (Plymouth, Devonport)

P

Page, Richard Lewis (South-West Hertfordshire)
Paice, James Edward Thornton (Cambridge, South East)
Paisley, Rev. Ian Richard Kyle (North Antrim)
Parkinson, Rt. Hon. Cecil Edward (Hertsmere)
Parry, Robert (Liverpool, Riverside)
Patchett, Terry (Barnsley, East)
Patnick, Cyril Irvine (Sheffield, Hallam)
Patten, Christopher Francis (Bath)
Patten, John Haggitt Charles (Oxford, West and Abingdon)
Pattie, Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Edwin (Chertsey and Walton)
Pawsey, James Francis (Rugby and Kenilworth)
Peacock, Mrs. Elizabeth Joan (Batley and Spen)
Pendry, Thomas (Stalybridge and Hyde)
Pike, Peter Leslie (Burnley)
Porter, David John (Waveney)
Porter, George Barrington (Wirral, South)
Portillo, Michael Denzil Xavier (Enfield, Southgate)
Powell, Raymond (Ogmore)
Powell, William Rhys (Corby)
Prescott, John Leslie (Kingston upon Hull, East)
Price, Sir David Ernest Campbell (Eastleigh)
Primarolo, Ms. Dawn (Bristol, South)

Q

Quin, Ms. Joyce Gwendolen (Gateshead, East)

R

Radice, Giles Heneage (North Durham)
Raffan, Keith William Twort (Delyn)
Raison, Rt. Hon. Timothy Hugh Francis (Aylesbury)
Randall, Stuart Jeffrey (Kingston upon Hull, West)
Rathbone, John Rankin (Lewes)
Redmond, Martin (Don Valley)
Redwood, John Alan (Wokingham)
Rees, Rt. Hon. Merlyn (Morley and Leeds, South)
Reid, John (Motherwell, North)
Renton, Ronald Timothy (Mid-Sussex)
Rhodes James, Robert Vidal (Cambridge)
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon Meredith (Kensington) *[died, May 1988]*
Richardson, Miss Josephine (Barking)
Riddick, Graham Edward Galloway (Colne Valley)
Ridley, Rt. Hon. Nicholas (Cirencester and Tewkesbury)
Ridsdale, Sir Julian Errington CBE (Harwich)
Rifkind, Rt. Hon. Malcolm Leslie QC (Edinburgh, Pentlands)
Roberts, Allan (Bootle)
Roberts, Ieuan Wyn Pritchard (Conwy)
Robertson, George Islay Macneill (Hamilton)
Robinson, Geoffrey (Coventry, North-West)
Robinson, Peter David (Belfast, East)
Roe, Mrs. Marion Audrey (Broxbourne)

Rogers, Allan Ralph (Rhondda)
Rooker, Jeffrey William (Birmingham, Perry Barr)
Ross, Ernest (Dundee, West)
Ross, William (East Londonderry)
Rossi, Sir Hugh Alexis Louis (Hornsey and Wood Green)
Rost, Peter Lewis (Erewash)
Rowe, Andrew John Bernard (Mid-Kent)
Rowlands, Edward (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney)
Ruddock, Ms. Joan Mary (Lewisham, Deptford)
Rumbold, Mrs. Angela Claire Rosemary CBE (Mitcham and Morden)
Ryder, Richard Andrew OBE (Mid-Norfolk)

S

Sackville, Hon. Thomas Geoffrey (Bolton, West)
Sainsbury, Hon. Timothy Alan Davan (Hove)
Salmond, Alexander Elliott Anderson (Banff and Buchan)
Sayeed, Jonathan (Bristol, East)
Scott, Nicholas Paul MBE (Chelsea)
Sedgemore, Brian Charles (Hackney, South and Shoreditch)
Shaw, David Lawrence (Dover)
Shaw, Sir John Giles Dunkerley (Pudsey)
Shaw, Sir Michael Norman (Scarborough)
Sheerman, Barry John (Huddersfield)
Sheldon, Rt. Hon. Robert Edward (Ashton under Lyne)
Shelton, William Jeremy Masefield (Streatham)
Shephard, Mrs. Gillian Patricia (South-West Norfolk)
Shepherd, Colin Ryley (Hereford)
Shepherd, Richard Charles Scrimgeour (Aldridge-Brownhills)
Shersby, Julian Michael (Uxbridge)
Shore, Rt. Hon. Peter David (Bethnal Green and Stepney)
Short, Clare (Birmingham, Ladywood)
Sillars, James (Glasgow, Govan) *[By-election, November 1988]*
Sims, Roger Edward (Chislehurst)
Skeet, Sir Trevor Herbert Harry (North Bedfordshire)
Skinner, Dennis Edward (Bolsover)
Smith, Andrew David (Oxford, East)
Smith, Christopher Robert, (Islington, South and Finsbury)
Smith, Sir Cyril MBE (Rochdale)
Smith, Sir Dudley Gordon (Warwick and Leamington)
Smith, Rt. Hon. John QC (Monklands, East)
Smith, Timothy John (Beaconsfield)
Smyth, Rev. William Martin (Belfast, South)
Snape, Peter Charles (West Bromwich, East)
Soames, Hon. Arthur Nicholas Winston (Crawley)
Soley, Clive Stafford (Hammersmith)
Spearing, Nigel John (Newham, South)
Speed, Herbert Keith (Ashford)
Speller, Antony (North Devon)
Spicer, Sir James Wilton (West Dorset)
Spicer, William Michael Hardy (South Worcestershire)
Squire, Robin Clifford (Hornchurch)
Stanbrook, Ivor Robert (Orpington)
Stanley, Rt. Hon. Sir John Paul (Tonbridge and Malling)
Steel, Rt. Hon. David Martin Scott (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
Steen, Anthony David (South Hams)
Steinberg, Gerald Neil (City of Durham)
Stern, Michael Charles (Bristol, North-West)
Stevens, Lewis David MBE (Nuneaton)
Stewart, Andrew Struthers (Sherwood)
Stewart, Bernard Harold Ian Halley RD (North Hertfordshire)
Stewart, John Allan (Eastwood)
Stokes, Sir John Heydon Romaine (Halesowen and Stourbridge)
Stott, Roger CBE (Wigan)
Stradling Thomas, Sir John (Monmouth)
Strang, Gavin Steel (Edinburgh, East)
Straw, John Whitaker (Blackburn)
Sumberg, David Anthony Gerald (Bury, South)
Summerson, Hugo Hawksley Fitzthomas (Walthamstow)

T

Tapsell, Sir Peter Hannay Bailey (East Lindsey)
Taylor, Edward Macmillan (Southend, East)
Taylor, Ian Colin, MBE (Esher)
Taylor, Rt. Hon. John David (Strangford)
Taylor, John Mark (Solihull)
Taylor, Matthew Owen John (Truro)
Taylor, Mrs. Winifred Ann (Dewsbury)
Tebbit, Rt. Hon. Norman Beresford (Chingford)
Temple-Morris, Peter (Leominster)
Thatcher, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Hilda (Finchley)
Thomas, Dafydd Elis (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy)
Thompson, Donald (Calder Valley)
Thompson, Hugh Patrick (Norwich, North)
Thompson, John (Wansbeck)
Thorne, Neil Gordon, OBE TD (Ilford, South)
Thornton, George Malcolm (Crosby)
Thurnham, Peter Giles (Bolton, North-East)
Townend, John Ernest (Bridlington)
Townsend, Cyril David (Bexleyheath)
Tracy, Richard Patrick (Surbiton)
Tredinnick, David Arthur Stephen (Bosworth)
Trippier, David Austin, RD (Rossendale and Darwen)
Trotter, Neville Guthrie (Tynemouth)
Twinn, Ian David (Edmonton)
Turner, Dennis (Wolverhampton, South-East)

V

Vaughan, Sir Gerard Folliott (Reading, East)
Vaz, Nigel Keith Anthony Standish (Leicester, East)
Viggers, Peter John (Gosport)

W

Waddington, Rt. Hon. David Charles QC (Ribble Valley)
Wakeham, Rt. Hon. John (South Colchester and Maldon)
Waldegrave, Hon. William Arthur (Bristol, West)
Walden, George Gordon Harvey CMG (Buckingham)
Walker, Alfred Cecil (Belfast, North)
Walker, Rt. Hon. Harold (Doncaster, Central)
Walker, Rt. Hon. Peter Edward MBE (Worcester)
Walker, William Connoll (North Tayside)
Wall, Charles Patrick (Bradford, North)
Wallace, James Robert (Orkney and Shetland)
Waller, Gary Peter Anthony (Keighley)
Walley, Joan Lorraine (Stoke on Trent, North)
Walters, Sir Dennis Murray MBE (Westbury)

Ward, John Devereux CBE (Poole)
Wardell, Gareth Lodwig (Gower)
Wardle, Charles Frederick (Bexhill and Battle)
Wareing, Robert Nelson (Liverpool, West Derby)
Warren, Kenneth Robin (Hastings and Rye)
Watts, John Arthur (Slough)
Weatherill, Rt. Hon. Bruce Bernard (Croydon, North-East)
Wells, Bowen (Hertford and Stortford)
Welsh, Andrew (Angus, East)
Welsh, Michael Collins (Doncaster, North)
Wheeler, John Daniel (Westminster, North)
Whitney, Raymond William OBE (Wycombe)
Widdecombe, Miss Ann Noreen (Maidstone)
Wiggin, Alfred William TD (Weston-super-Mare)
Wigley, Dafydd (Caernarfon)
Wilkinson, John Arbuthnot Ducane (Ruislip-Northwood)
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2

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES VOLUME 142

FIRST VOLUME OF SESSION 1988-89

House of Commons

Tuesday 22 November 1988

The House met at twenty-five minutes past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker *in the Chair*]

Message to attend Her Majesty:

The House went; and having returned:

The Sitting was suspended until half-past Two o'clock, and then resumed.

SESSIONAL ORDERS

Elections

Ordered,

That all Members who are returned for two or more places in any part of the United Kingdom to make their Election for which of the places they will serve, within one week after it shall appear that there is no question upon the Return for that place; and if anything shall come in question touching the Return or Election of any Member, he is to withdraw during the time the matter is in debate; and that all Members returned upon double Returns do withdraw till their Returns are determined.

Resolved,

That no Peer of the Realm, except a Peer of Ireland, hath any right to give his vote in the Election of any Member to serve in Parliament.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been elected or returned a Member of this House, or endeavoured so to be, by Bribery or any other corrupt practices, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against all such persons as shall have been wilfully concerned in such Bribery or other corrupt practices.

Witnesses

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been tampering with any Witness, in respect of his evidence to be given to this House, or any Committee thereof, or directly or indirectly hath endeavoured to deter or hinder any person from appearing or giving evidence the same is declared to be a high crime and misdemeanour; and this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath given false evidence in any case before this House, or any Committee thereof, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

Metropolitan Police

Ordered,

That the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis do take care that during the Session of Parliament the passages through the streets leading to this House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members to and from this House, and that no disorder be allowed in Westminster Hall, or in the passages leading to this House, during the Sitting of Parliament, and that there be no annoyance therein or thereabouts; and that the Serjeant at Arms attending this House do communicate this Order to the Commissioner aforesaid.

Votes and Proceedings

Resolved,

That the Votes and Proceedings of this House be printed, being first perused by Mr. Speaker; and that he do appoint the printing thereof; and that no person but such as he shall appoint do presume to print the same.

Outlawries

Bill for the more effectual preventing Clandestine Outlawries; read the First time; to be read a Second time.

Journal

Ordered,

That the Journal of this House, from the end of the last Session to the end of the present Session, with an index thereto, be printed.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by the appointment and under the direction of Clifford John Boulton, Esquire, C.B., the Clerk of this House.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by such person as shall be licensed by Mr. Speaker, and that no other person do presume to print the same.

Queen's Speech

Mr. Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy.

I shall direct that the terms of the Gracious Speech be printed in the Votes and Proceedings. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I look forward with much pleasure to a visit by Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands as part of the celebrations of the William and Mary Tercentenary.

I also look forward to visiting Barbados next March to mark the 350th Anniversary of the House of Assembly there and to being present next autumn on the occasion of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malaysia.

My Government will continue to attach the highest priority to the maintenance of national security and the preservation of peace with freedom and justice. They will maintain strong and effective defences and will stand fully by their obligations to the NATO Alliance.

My Government will strive for balanced and verifiable measures of arms control and for a world-wide ban on chemical weapons. They strongly support the United States' proposals for 50 per cent. reductions in American and Soviet strategic nuclear weapons. They will work for the elimination of disparities in conventional forces in Europe with the aim of achieving a stable balance at lower levels.

My Government will continue to strive to break down the barriers between East and West and to ensure that the Vienna Review Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe leads to further progress on human rights. They look forward to building further on the improved relationship with the Soviet Union and to a visit to this country by the Soviet leader, President Gorbachev.

My Government look forward to the completion of the Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and will continue to work for the restoration of that country's independence and non-aligned status. They will continue to play a full part in the work of the United Nations and to work for peaceful solutions to regional conflicts.

My Government will continue to work with our European Community partners to complete the single market, to reinforce budgetary discipline and further to reform the Common Agricultural Policy. They will play a full part in multilateral negotiations designed to liberalise international trade and agriculture.

My Government will maintain a substantial aid programme, designed to alleviate poverty and to promote sustainable economic and social progress in developing countries.

My Government will continue the fight against international terrorism and against trafficking in drugs.

My Government will honour their commitments to the people of the Falkland Islands while continuing to seek more normal relations with Argentina. They will continue to discharge their responsibilities towards Hong Kong and its people and will work closely with the Chinese Government to implement the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the Public Service will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government will continue to pursue firm financial policies designed to bear down on inflation. They will continue to promote enterprise and to foster the conditions necessary for the sustained growth of output and employment.

They will maintain firm control of public expenditure so that, while allowing further improvements in priority services, it continues to fall as a proportion of national income, thus providing scope for further reductions in taxation, as and when prudent.

A Bill will be brought forward to reform the law on local government capital and housing finance, on home improvement grants, and on the conduct of local authority business.

My Government will continue to attach very great importance to protecting our environment, both nationally and internationally.

A Bill will be introduced for England and Wales to establish a National Rivers Authority and to provide for the sale of the utility functions of the water authorities.

Legislation will be introduced to restructure and to provide for the sale of the electricity supply industry in Great Britain.

A Bill will be introduced to remove unnecessary obstacles to employment, particularly in relation to women and young people, and to alter training arrangements.

My Government will vigorously pursue their policies for reducing crime. A Bill will be introduced to replace the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act. Legislation will be brought forward to provide for a national membership scheme to control admission to football matches.

A Bill will be introduced to replace section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 with provisions prohibiting only disclosures of information which would be harmful to the public interest.

A Bill will be introduced to put the Security Service on a statutory basis under the authority of the Secretary of State.

A Bill will be introduced to improve and rationalise the law governing the care and protection of children.

My Government will continue to take action to raise standards throughout education.

My Government are committed to strengthening the National Health Service and to ensuring that it is developed and improved in an efficient way that offers choice to patients.

For Scotland, legislation will be brought forward to enable parents to choose that their children's schools should be managed outside the control of local authorities. A Bill will be introduced to transfer the Scottish Bus Group to the private sector.

In Northern Ireland, my Government will continue their efforts to eradicate terrorism, to give elected representatives greater involvement in the affairs of the Province, and to maintain close co-operation with the Republic of Ireland. A Bill will be laid before you to strengthen the law of Northern Ireland on fair employment. Legislation will be introduced to extend the franchise for local elections and to require from candidates a declaration against terrorism.

A Bill will be brought forward to amend the law on social security.

Legislation will be introduced to reform company law and the law on mergers.

A Bill will be brought forward to modify the driver licensing system and to provide for new systems of route guidance for drivers.

Other measures will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

[First Day]

Mr. Speaker: It may be for the convenience of the House if I announce the proposed pattern of the remaining days of the debate on the Loyal Address: Wednesday 23 November: home affairs—freedom, fairness and opportunity; Thursday 24 November—social security and employment; Friday 25 November—foreign affairs and defence; Monday 28 November—environment and industry; Tuesday 29 November—the economy.

2.35 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:
Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

I am very conscious of the double honour that is involved in being invited to make this speech. In the first place, the honour falls, rightly, upon my constituency. The Pudsey parliamentary division was created in 1885. Today it is formed from the old borough of Pudsey, which was granted a charter by Queen Victoria in 1901, shortly before her death, and the former urban districts of Horsforth and Aireborough. The area was historically part of the ancient West Riding of Yorkshire, whose disappearance from the map of local government in England my constituents profoundly regret.

Pudsey was first stirred by political excitement as far back as 1846, when the citizens decided to celebrate the repeal of the Corn Laws by holding a great feast, the piece de resistance of which was the famous Pudsey pudding. It was composed of about 20 stones of flour, a similar amount of suet and very much larger quantities of fruit. It was boiled in a dyer's vat for three days and three nights before being lifted out by crane, carted through the streets and served to the local populace. But the organisers were good Yorkshire folk, and all consumers were charged the princely sum of one shilling each for as much as they could eat. I suspect that that was one of the earliest examples of a means-tested benefit. That, of course, is an off-the-record remark.

The parliamentary seat was a more permanent memorial than the pudding, although over time the Pudsey seat became the Pudsey and Otley seat, and then reverted to being Pudsey. The first representative was a Liberal. The Tories fought back hard, and between 1885 and 1922 Tories and Liberals fought the seat keenly. In the 1887 election, Pudsey headed all the parliamentary divisions in Yorkshire as the seat having the fewest illiterate voters.

In 1922 Major L. H. Fawkes, chairman of the agriculture and drainage committee of West Riding county council, was elected in the Tory interest. The Fawkes family of Farnley hall numbered among its predecessors Guy Fawkes whose attendance at this House we celebrate annually. But the Fawkes family is more justly acclaimed as patrons of the painter Turner for many years.

Major Fawkes was the Member of Parliament for Pudsey for only one year. He saw the West Riding of Yorkshire Drainage Bill safely on to the statute book, and then returned to resume his more potent role on the

[Sir Giles Shaw]

drainage and agriculture committee. Nevertheless, as befits his ancestry, the beacon lit by Fawkes in 1922 has remained unquenched, and this year we celebrate 66 years of continuous Tory representation in the borough of Pudsey.

There are two other celebrations this year to which I must refer. Pudsey is surely best and most justifiably known as being the birthplace of Sir Leonard Hutton and the training ground of many famous cricketers. For example, I refer to Sutcliffe, Tunnicliffe, Halliday and Illingworth, but Sir Leonard is surely Pudsey's most famous son. This year we celebrated the 50th anniversary of his record-breaking score of 364 at the Oval test match in 1938. To mark the event, the Pudsey St. Lawrence club, with a little assistance from the Yorkshire county club, organised a celebration dinner in honour of Sir Leonard, to which nearly 500 people—cricket lovers from all over the world—came to pay honour to the great man.

Another national event took place in my constituency this year. The other shrine in my constituency is Harry Ramsden's fish and chip shop in Guiseley, the largest fish and chipper in the world. On 30 October this year, it celebrated its 60th anniversary, when it offered fish and chips at the 1928 price of 4d or 2p per portion, and it sold 10,182 portions. That celebration was graced by the ample presence of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—no, I think that that should read, "The celebration was amplified by the gracious presence"—for which I am extremely grateful.

Although it is not easy to claim that Pudsey is a microcosm of England, it is a microcosm of Yorkshire, and I think that my constituents would prefer it that way. Geographically, the area is located between the major cities of Leeds and Bradford. It straddles the River Aire, with Pudsey on one side and Horsforth and Aireborough on the other, and it reflects in full measure the history of the industrial revolution in West Yorkshire, with the wool textile industry predominating.

The villages of Rodley, Farsley and Calverley, together with Horsforth, Yeadon and Guiseley, all contain old areas of stone housing, fine churches and many fine chapels, many of them within walking distance of the mills that once provided the main source of employment. Those communities are well-established, with a long tradition of independence and a dogged determination to succeed despite the odds. But today the economy is radically changed. New industries—pharmaceuticals, chemicals and light engineering—have grown up. Together with electrical engineering and electronics, they have provided new skills for new markets.

In addition, the economic revival which the Government have set in train has also brought new opportunities for enterprise. For example, the old crane works at Rodley, which were closed by NEI, have been bought by previous employees and management and are in business once again. The Johnson Radley mould works in Pudsey have also been bought back from United Glass by a management team led by some of the original family owners.

New markets for old skills have also been found. The cast iron foundry of Sloan and Davidson, established well over 100 years ago in Stanningley, past masters of decorative 19th century iron work and finials, has recently provided much of the new decorative iron work that hon. Members can see shining at the top of Big Ben itself.

The textile companies that remain have also fought hard to establish new businesses both at home and overseas—Hainsworths, also of Stanningley, exporting billiard cloth all over the world, and Carter and Parker of Guiseley, whose Wendy knitting wools click in many languages.

Those things do not happen by accident. They happen because entrepreneurs and skilled craftsmen take full advantage of improved economic circumstances, and that, combined with Yorkshire grit and not a little Pudsey pride, has meant that unemployment in the Pudsey division is now below average for West Yorkshire, and the prospects look increasingly bright.

In March, my constituents in Pudsey were delighted by a visit from the Prince of Wales to the 4th Volunteer Battalion of the Parachute Regiment at Thornbury barracks. This part of West Yorkshire has strong links with the Territorial Army, and I know that the visit by its colonel-in-chief was a great boost to the local volunteers and their families.

Likewise, my constituents in Horsforth gave a rousing welcome to the Princess of Wales when she came in September to visit the Barnados regional headquarters. That was an occasion unrivalled for local schoolchildren, but especially for those young people—many from tragic backgrounds—whom she met. I suspect that all my constituents are baffled, if not appalled, by the recent adverse exposure given by journalists to this admirable and hardworking couple, who bring so much joy and so much happiness to so many people. How difficult it is, and how long it takes, to establish high standards in public life. How quickly and how easily can those same standards be wantonly undermined. This is a Loyal Address, and I trust that it will long remain so.

I am conscious, too, that the second honour in moving this motion falls upon me as the representative of Pudsey in Parliament. I was honoured to be invited to join the Government in 1979 and to serve throughout the first two Administrations of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister, as is her wont, certainly kept me on my toes. I started in Northern Ireland, and when, after 18 months, the prisoners went on hunger strike, I was moved. I then went to the Department of the Environment, where I spent two years with responsibility for, amongst other things, the water industry. We had the first national water strike ever, and I was moved. Undaunted, my right hon. Friend tried again and off I went to the Department of Energy, with responsibility for the coal industry. The miners struck, and I was duly moved.

Following that, with even greater courage, my right hon. Friend moved me further up the picket line, to the Home Office, with responsibilities for the police. I had not been there too long before we had riots on the streets, and I was moved. But such was my right hon. Friend's magnanimity that she sent me to the Department of Industry, which, I must confess, was not noted at that time for ministerial longevity. However, I had the supreme satisfaction of working on the progress of British Steel towards privatisation, which is to be realised very shortly. That is an achievement which surely marks a special phase for Sir Robert Scholey and his admirable team at British Steel. I worked, too, on the welcome resurrection of the

Rover Group, which, under the splendid leadership of Graham Day, has now moved forward to the position whereby an acquisition is being arranged with British Aerospace.

When, at my request, I returned to these Benches after the last election, it was with a memory bank of unique and happy experiences in five different Departments, under seven Secretaries of State, for which I am profoundly grateful. I thought that possibly this was my last move, but, I suppose, it reached the Whips Office that I am a mover and that from time to time, in racing parlance, "a nice little mover" is required. So I have been allowed one more outing today.

My constituents would wish me to say how delighted they are that the Gracious Speech refers to President Gorbachev's visit next month. Frankly, no further evidence can be needed to establish the British Prime Minister as the most influential statesman in the Western world. It is that position which gives such strength to the commitment in the Gracious Speech to a strong, internationally based defence policy. I especially welcome the stress laid on the elimination of disparities in conventional forces. My constituents wholeheartedly support a defence policy based on strength, from which all successful negotiations must flow.

I welcome, too, the commitment in the Gracious Speech to environmental issues, but I can think of no area of public policy where there is such a credibility gap between the desire to achieve and the willingness to pay. Environmental problems are complicated and extremely difficult to solve. They involve changing public attitudes as well as practices, and they take a long time to work through. Only a strong and growing economy can afford such a commitment, and the Government are certainly courageous to take up that challenge. Such policies will have a profound influence on the privatisation of the water industry, which is referred to in the Gracious Speech.

I am a strong supporter of the water industry, which has for too long been restricted in its ability to raise capital to meet the rising standards, expectations and increasing obligations that have been heaped upon it. But the country should be left in no doubt that the joy of green policies can be achieved only at the pain of substantial increases in costs and prices.

In constituencies such as Pudsey, environmental issues are keenly felt. The residents action group of Calverley jealously guards the open spaces that still remain, few though they be, between Leeds and Bradford. The conservation group of Horsforth is particularly concerned about the problems of pollution in the River Aire. It is good to know that such issues have now moved towards the centre of policy making.

Any programme of legislation is a matter of choice and selection, with demand nearly always outstripping supply. On the question of social legislation, the Gracious Speech indicates that the Government have decided to give priority to the implementation of changes in the law affecting child abuse. I welcome that. Recently, in common with other hon. Members on both sides of the House, I have become involved in these tragic issues. I am sure that my constituents, especially those in Rawdon who have helped to lead the Leeds parents action group, and those in Swinnow who have suffered under the present system, will be delighted to hear of the Government's commitment to give priority to implementing the findings of the Butler-Sloss inquiry.

My constituents will also welcome the reform of the Official Secrets Act 1911, and the more permanent arrangements to be made for the prevention of terrorism. I believe that the people of Pudsey and Guiseley are amazed that we have continued for so long with temporary measures on the latter, and that we have allowed the Official Secrets Act to fall into such disrepute, bearing in mind how important it is to maintain confidentiality in the public service. That we should be bringing the Security Service on to a statutory basis also shows immense political courage. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will have little time this Session for writing novels—despite, I suspect, an abundance of plots.

I note the references to changing the law on company mergers. That too I welcome, bearing in mind the concern expressed by many hon. Members who represent Yorkshire and elsewhere at the Nestlé takeover of Rowntree. It would appear that the present position of awaiting a decision on referral favours the predator rather than the prey. I hope that that imbalance will be corrected in the forthcoming legislation.

The Government's overriding objective, however, must be to pursue economic policies to contain inflation, as emphasised in the Gracious Speech. My constituents know quite a lot about thrift. They understand that high interest charges will deter borrowing, but they also note that higher interest rates and mortgage rates will increase the rate of inflation. Their question is, "By how much and for how long?" Presently, the answers to those questions are unclear. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will reassure my constituents about that when he comes to address the House.

The Gracious Speech sets out a full programme for a full Session, indicating once again the Government's commitment to the radical restructuring of Britain, which they began in 1979. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister can rest assured that the Tory voters of Pudsey will continue to back her judgment with their support and her confidence with their commitment. I commend the motion to the House.

2.54 pm

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): I am delighted to second the motion.

When I had recovered from the pleasant surprise of being asked to make this speech, I consulted a few of my hon. Friends on what was expected of me. I asked one how long my speech should be. He said, "Well, I have never heard one that was too short." Bearing in mind that we are here today to listen to the protagonists of the debate I shall follow his advice, but it is unusual for a humble Back Bencher such as I to speak to such a full House. I am used to an audience of 20 at about 8.15 pm, when everyone else is having dinner.

Some things have changed a lot in the past 100 years. In 1888 the Loyal Address was moved in the House of Lords by a Scottish earl in full Highland costume, and in the House of Commons by a Mr. Wharton, attired in the uniform of a deputy lieutenant. During his speech, Mr. Wharton said that it was 14 years since he had last spoken in the House. I doubt that any of us could get away with such reticence today.

In other ways, things are surprisingly similar. One hundred years ago the Queen's Speech dealt with, among other things, the Russian-Afghan border, troubles in

[Mr. John Maples]

Ireland, local government proposals to mitigate the burdens on ratepayers and the promotion of technical education. Fifty years ago, in 1938, it dealt with young offenders, education and improvements in public health. It is interesting to reflect how the same problems seem to recur and how each generation must find new solutions. Perhaps it should serve as a warning to us that few, if any, of the problems that we face are new and that none of the solutions that we find is likely to prove timeless.

In seconding the Loyal Address 50 years ago, Mr. Markham said that his first impression was that

> "this House, having recently had a rise in pay, was now in for a considerable amount of overtime and overwork."

I expect that those sentiments will be echoed today. I should like to say on behalf of some of my colleagues on the Government Back Benches that there is one item that we are sorry is omitted from the Gracious Speech. That would have been to raise to 90 per cent. the majority necessary to suspend the Ten o'clock rule.

Fifty years ago, Mr. Markham went on to say:

> "In commerce . . . we have regained our old place of first among all competitors. Even in football a British team is now able to beat the rest of Europe by a resounding margin."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1938; Vol. 341, c. 17-19.]

Unfortunately, we can no longer make the second of those claims, but I am glad to see that my hon. Friend and neighbour, the Minister with responsibility for sport, plans to introduce proposals to make the spectators behave better, even if he cannot improve the quality of the team.

In 1974 the Loyal Address was seconded by the present Leader of the Opposition. He said that he and the proposer of the motion were fellow members of the Tribune Group, which he described as

> "The light cavalry of the Parliamentary Labour Party".—[*Official Report*, 12 March 1974; Vol. 870, c. 51.]

I wonder whether that was an entirely happy choice of phrase. My military history is not too strong, but I seem to remember that the light cavalry's most famous outing was in the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava. However, if the right hon. Gentleman feels that it is still an appropriate phrase, I am sure that some of my right hon. and hon. Friends will be happy to play the part of the Russian guns for his Light Brigade, although I am relieved to see that he cannot quite muster 600.

My constituency is an inner London seat, but it is mainly suburban in character. We have little or no local industry and most people commute to work in central London. We have some beautiful public parks and leafy, tree-lined streets, but we also have some rundown council estates, with their associated inner-city problems. Most people are very prosperous. Many more now own their own homes. They have enthusiastically taken advantage of the opportunities open to them. They will welcome the commitment in the Queen's Speech to continue the economic policies that have brought that prosperity. However, others have not been so fortunate; some through no fault of their own. Old age, sickness and disability can leave people with few opportunities. I welcome the Government's efforts in housing and urban regeneration to help improve their job prospects and living conditions, but there is still much to be done.

Lewisham, West is a bell-wether, in that in every general election except one for the past 50 years it has gone with the Government. The exception was when Chris Price held the seat in 1979. One of my most distinguished predecessors was the father of my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General, the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), who held the seat from 1938 to 1945. Lewisham, West has also been represented by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). I cannot help noticing that the electorate has a nasty habit of moving its Member of Parliament on every election or two. I hope that that is a fate that I shall manage to avoid.

For almost all of the last Parliament, one of my neighbours was John Silkin. No new Member could have asked for a kinder local colleague. Together with my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) we mounted several all-party campaigns for the benefit of Lewisham and, as a result, I learned a great deal from Mr. Silkin and those occasions. His sudden death was a tragic loss. I am glad to have this opportunity to pay tribute to him, because I know that he is remembered with great affection on both sides of the House.

Like all hon. Members with less than 50 per cent. of the vote, I keep a close watch on the party in third place in my constituency, which over the past few elections has run Liberal and alliance candidates and, in future, I suppose there will be Democrat and SDP candidates. I find it all confusing. I want to do all that I can to help it maintain its vital 15 per cent. of the vote, but I no longer know where to send my subscription. I thought that I had it straight. I thought that members of the SDP were watered-down Tories and that Liberals were watered-down Socialists. However, I do not know where a Democrat fits into all that. Perhaps it bears out the famous letter of A. P. Herbert to *The Times*, in which he said:

> "Dear Sir, The Liberal Party is like a herring, its backbone is to the left or the right, depending upon which way you open it."

I welcome the commitment in the Queen's Speech to take action to improve standards in education. Londoners have been concerned for some time about the apparent lack of importance attached to the achievement of high standards, and they will support such measures. My constituents will also welcome the commitment to strengthen and improve the National Health Service, which they see as a guarantee of health care, regardless of ability to pay. I also welcome the proposal to denationalise electricity, which for the first time will give those who work in it and its customers a direct participation in their industry.

In Sir Humphrey Appleby's "Yes, Minister" diary, there is an observation on the need for mandarins to control Ministers which says that avoiding precedents does not mean that one should never do anything, merely that one should never do anything for the first time. The Queen's Speech must be upsetting Sir Humphrey.

Like many of my colleagues, I became actively involved in politics in the mid-1970s because I was concerned at the direction our country was taking. Above all, I wanted to see the re-establishment of a free enterprise economy, and I am happy and proud to have played a small part in that during the five years that I have been here. Whatever our different views and experiences, we are united in having the privilege of serving in the House, of living in a country with an elected parliamentary democracy, of being free to say what we like, and being governed by the rule of law which only Parliament can change. Those are rights and freedoms that have taken a long time to develop, and our greatest trust is to guard them carefully for the generations to come.

3.3 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I am sure that I speak for the majority of hon. Members on both sides of the House when I warmly compliment the hon. Members for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) and for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) on their excellent speeches in proposing and seconding the Loyal Address. The hon. Member for Pudsey enjoys great respect and not a little affection in this place, both of which will have been enhanced further by his brilliant and beautiful speech. Since it would offend him, I will not put it in the Hutton class, but I shall refer to another Pudsey lad, Herbert Sutcliffe; as parliamentary speeches go, it was in the Sutcliffe league. I warmly compliment him on it.

Such are his personal qualities and capabilities, manifested in ministerial roles as well as on the Back Benches, that I thought that the felicitous feelings about the hon. Gentleman went well beyond the Chamber. Therefore, I was somewhat suprised to see that Mr. Colin Welch of the *Daily Mail*, not characteristically an uncharitable man, described the hon. Member for Pudsey as a

> "roly-poly version of Dr. Bodkin Adams."

I am willing to subscribe a pair of opera glasses to Mr. Colin Welch because from where I stand I see a fairish, not to say gingerish, thinning-on-toppish, not over-tall, pleasant sort of cove—the kind of personal characteristics which, for some reason or other, I find completely acceptable. The hon. Gentleman is not at all like Dr. Bodkin Adams.

The courtesy and capability of the hon. Member for Pudsey are obvious to everyone. They are so obvious that, as you may know, Mr. Speaker, there was some astonishment in the House earlier this year when there was a noxious and unsubstantiated rumour circulating in the House that someone, somewhere was trying to procure your removal from the Chair to make way for a replacement. This may not have come to your notice, Mr. Speaker, because I realise that such things often do not. However, I read in the *Sunday Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* that the name most frequently circulated at the time as a potential replacement was that of the hon. Member for Pudsey.

I could not believe the story and I do not think that any other hon. Member believed it, because from our knowledge of the hon. Gentleman's character, there was no possibility of any such vaunting ambition being entertained in that talented yet modest breast. All became clear when I read the "Peterborough" column in *The Daily Telegraph* last summer. It said:

> "Any premature controversy about the Speakership would wreck the Prime Minister's plans to appoint another Conservative to succeed the present Speaker."

Clearly, someone was taking completely justified pre-emptive action—what in Welsh rugby we call getting your retaliation in first. It absolutely ensured that there was no possibility of embarrassing you, Mr. Speaker, or the hon. Member for Pudsey. All that concerned me as that episode closed was that someone, somewhere had taken the name of the hon. Member for Pudsey in vain.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West made an equally distinguished contribution and paid a thoughtful and sincere tribute to the late and much-loved John Silkin. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West is a newer Member, but he has already earned a reputation for considerable perspicacity. That was evident early in his parliamentary career to those of us who watch these things. In his maiden speech, made just three weeks after he came to the House, he offered an answer to the tiresome problem of local rates. He offered the idea of a poll tax. He talked of

> "the introduction of a poll tax of about £25 per year on everybody over 18 who was neither unemployed nor living on supplementary benefit".—[*Official Report*, 1 July 1983; Vol. 44, c. 849.]

Since that time, and in terms that will be familiar to you, Mr. Speaker, an amendment has been made.

The perceptiveness of the hon. Member for Lewisham, West is not limited to local government finance. It extends to public transport. Not long ago, he told a survey, an examination, of the way in which hon. Members get to the House:

> "maybe if everyone else stayed off the road, public transport would be quick enough—but it isn't yet . . . so I use my car."

Such candour is admirable, and goes with the hon. Gentleman's many other qualities.

The proposer and seconder of the Loyal Address do not have in common only their abilities. They are joined by the fact that they are both economic evangelicals. The hon. Member for Pudsey has, for more than 10 years, been an enthusiastic advocate of British membership of the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West has forcefully argued for some years, in the *Financial Times* and *The Times*, for the use of credit rationing, as he put it, to

> "actively restrain bank lending to individuals and property companies while encouraging lending for productive investment."

I do not want to cause trouble for either hon. Member, but I wonder what the Chancellor thinks of these various proposals. Perhaps he will tell us when, next Tuesday, he gives us his response to those charming speeches, and to the ideas that both hon. Members have rehearsed with some conviction.

I hope that the Chancellor will also give us answers to other questions. Perhaps he will tell us, as I am prepared to accept, that what he really had in mind was a new benefit with new money to help some of the poorest and most elderly of our people. I am sure that that is what was in his mind, but why did he feel that it was necessary, when he was about to offer such a bonus and such mercy, to "educate" his Back Benchers to give him their support?

There are basic policy questions as well. We want to know whether the Government's intentions towards pensioners' benefits are guided by the reality that there are 3 million retired people officially in poverty and another 3 million who are very near the poverty line. Will that be the reality that guides the Government's intentions, or will those intentions be guided by the completely unfounded and unsustainable assumption that only a tiny minority of pensioners have difficulty in making ends meet? We want an answer on that both from the Chancellor and from the First Lord of the Treasury.

I have asked the Prime Minister three times whether she agrees with the Chancellor's view, as expressed at the Lobby briefing, and thrice she has denied him. Perhaps it was not entirely to do with the Lobby briefing. Perhaps it was to do with wider reasons, for, after all, this is the Chancellor who, as recently as last March, told us in his Budget speech that we could expect a balance of payments

[Mr. Neil Kinnock]

deficit of £4 billion, and the balance of payments deficit is now £12 billion. This is the Chancellor who told us in his Budget speech in March that he expected an inflation rate of 4 per cent.—still too high, he said—and we now have an inflation rate of 6·4 per cent. and rising—the highest of any major industrial economy.

There is no oil price hike for the Chancellor to blame, no surge in commodity prices. This inflation did not come from external sources, but was made in Downing street by a Government who deliberately foster a consumption surge financed by credit and by a Chancellor who has now resorted to the primitive single instrument of interest rate rises to try to cap that rise in credit and consumption. Inflation comes from mortgage rate increases and rent increases, from price rises imposed to fatten the electricity industry to prepare it for privatisation, from postal charges and from transport charges. Those price rises across that wide spectrum are all supposed to be the firm financial policies designed to bear down upon inflation. The Government's rises in prices do not bear down on inflation—they bear up underneath inflation, and force it higher all the time.

Because the Chancellor insists on using that single weapon of interest rate rises, there is another result. As the hon. Member for Lewisham, West has pointed out, as the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) has pointed out, as the Opposition have pointed out and as the Chancellor himself admitted in his Autumn Statement, using interest rate rises as the sole instrument of economic policy bears down much more heavily on investment than on consumption.

The result is that, even if the Chancellor were to get the soft landing that he hopes for, in its wake would be left an economy that is under-trained, under-financed, under-invested and losing its market share and competitiveness. It would then have to face the extra pressures and challenges of the single market of 1992. Those are the weaknesses that the Chancellor should now address. If he does not address those basic, long-term weaknesses, the forecast that he made in the Autumn Statement, that next year the growth of imports would be cut by more than half and the growth of exports would increase by two and a half times, will turn out to be false, and as fraudulent as the estimates that he gave us in the Budget of a different level of inflation, a different balance of payments and different money supply figures.

The Prime Minister rightly said two months ago:

"the health of the economy and the health of the environment are totally dependent upon each other."

When such sentiments were expressed and we were told in the same speech that protecting the balance of nature is "one of the great challenges of the late twentieth century", we could reasonably have expected that the Queen's Speech would propose new legislation, new regulations and new investment to face up to that great challenge that the Prime Minister correctly identified.

We and the country had reason to believe that the Queen's Speech could be a green speech, but all we have is the vacuous statement that the Government

"will continue to attach very great importance to protecting our environment, both nationally and internationally."

They say that they will continue that policy, yet British research into the ozone layer, climatic changes, carbon dioxide discharges and energy efficiency are all cut and insufficiently financed. They say that they will continue to protect the environment, yet Britain has the dirtiest beaches in Europe, 11 million people in our country are obliged to drink sub-standard water and there is no strategy for managing the increasing quantities of toxic and hazardous chemical waste. *The Lancet* can report an "uncontrolled" outbreak of salmonella disease, the incidence of which has increased by nine times in the last few years, yet the numbers of environmental health officers are cut because of local government cuts.

The Government say that they will continue to protect the environment, yet senior members of the pollution inspectorate resign because of lack of Government commitment and there are no serious proposals from the Government for conserving energy and reducing its use, which is widely understood to be the single most important policy for reducing the greenhouse effect. How, then, can we accept that the Government will continue to protect the environment?

If attaching "very great importance" to the environment means anything, the Government should now embrace the "green gauntlet" challenge thrown down by Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the World Wildlife Fund in the form of 30 practicable proposals, and should immediately introduce the kind of policies set out in that consensus document. If they were to do that, they would prove their earnest and they would also obtain support throughout the House; as the majority of the major proposals of that document have been Labour party policy for years, we would support the Government with enthusiasm. Until the Government take that course, the undertaking to

"attach very great importance to protecting our environment",

will come to a very great nothing. That is why we have to secure the change.

It would not be true to say that no Bills of environmental importance are promulgated in the Queen's Speech. There are two, both with significant impact on the environment, but neither brings anything of benefit. The Government propose to sell control of the water and electricity industries to private monopolies. Both proposals will be long debated and strongly resisted by Opposition Members. Some Conservative Members share our view that the privatisation of a natural resource such as water and a vital service such as electricity has no justification in common sense or in the common interest.

There is no reason of public service or consumer interest that can justify the sell-offs. There is no industrial, strategic or economic logic to them. Those who buy the water and electricity industries will do so for gain. It will not be malevolence that makes them look for profit before anything else; it will be a sheer business requirement. To make that money, the owners of the water and electricity companies will either fail to make the necessary investment in standards and safety or they will introduce huge increases in charges regardless of the ability of consumers to pay. A nuclear tax and a water tax will be levied by private monopolies in those industries.

In a broadcast over the weekend, the Minister for Water and Planning said that the only way for improvement in the water industry was to sell it off. That was absurd in a country in which large-scale, long-term investment by private industry is the rare exception, not the regular rule. Indeed, it was the very condition of the industries and their private ownership that produced the practical reason for taking them into public ownership. Those acts of community ownership of essential assets did not come as an application of ideology. It is certain, however, that the sell-off of these industries is the product of nothing but the application of ideology. The British people bought and paid for the industries over the decades, and they will pay dearly for this application of Government ideology.

The Queen's Speech contains a reference, rightly and obviously, to Northern Ireland. There has been a further year of terrorism and tragedy and today, once again, a family in Northern Ireland mourns a murder. Before the Government introduce the measures that are suggested in the Queen's Speech, I shall refer to the decision, news of which came this week, to cut neighbourhood policing, transport policing and crime prevention, to close some police stations and to reduce the hours that other police stations remain open in Northern Ireland.

Those decisions would in any event be a cause of objection and reconsideration for all parts of the law-abiding community in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, but the concern that the changes in policing have generated was raised to a different level by the broadcast by the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office on Sunday. When questioned about the changes in policing by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, he said:

> "We didn't choose the priorities. It was the Chief Constable."

That was one of the most disingenuous and disgraceful statements to be made by any Minister. Everyone must know that the responsibility for the cuts and transfers in the RUC lies with the Government, not with the Chief Constable, not with the RUC and not with the police authority. Any shortages that brought the changes must be made good.

The Minister's attempt to avoid blame was only the latest addition to a long list of such evasions. It happened only a couple of weeks ago, with the publication of the Fennell report on the King's Cross tragedy. It appears that there are no backstops in Whitehall. It seems that the Secretaries of State for Transport and the Environment were so busy washing their hands of responsibility that they could not pick up their pens to write out the resignations that they should have tendered.

Another example of evasion has arisen with the regrading of nurses. Ministers at the Department of Health have encouraged health managers to take their nurses to court. Do not the Government understand that loyal nurses are angry and dismayed at the way in which they have been treated? If they do not, they should meet nurses such as the sister who came to my surgery a week ago. She has worked for 19 years as a sister and she finds herself on a low grading. There has been no negotiation, no consultation and no explanation.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Appeal.

Mr. Kinnock: The hon. Gentleman says, "Appeal." Of course she is appealing. Do not the Government understand how insulted and let down nurses of that experience feel? That explains the feeling in the profession now. She is the kind of nurse who has never extended her tea break. Like so many other nurses, because of her dedication she works hours of overtime without pay, as a matter of course. That is the kind of person whom the Government must be concerned about when feelings of bitterness and resentment are obvious.

If the Minister needs convincing, he should meet the registered general nurses who hold registered mental nurse or registered certified midwife qualifications and see how they feel. After all that additional training, they find themselves on low grades. In this, the era of the specialist nurse, imagine how staff nurses who want to undertake extra courses to meet shortages in intensive care, paediatric intensive care, midwifery and mental illness, feel when they are downgraded to D during the time that they attend courses. What inducement is that to the modern nurse of either sex to train for the additional qualifications necessary to end the shortages?

A nursing auxiliary at the North Middlesex hospital was referred to last week in *Nursing Times and Nursing Mirror*. She was awarded a British Empire Medal this year for her services to nursing and then put on grade A, the lowest grade. I suppose that that says it all about the insensitivities, inadequacies and lack of negotiation and consultation built into the grading system.

I appeal to the Secretary of State for Health to meet the working nurses from the Royal College of Nursing, from the Royal College of Midwives, from the health visitors, from the Confederation of Health Service Employees and the National Union of Public Employees. It does not matter about the unions: he should meet the nurses and see how they respond. He should tell them that he will guarantee to ensure that the review will be fair and speedy and will take proper account of qualifications, experience and responsibility.

A short time ago, the Prime Minister rightly told us that responsibility goes hand in hand with freedom. She said that those who seek one must be prepared to offer the other. Of course, the Prime Minister's words were absolutely true. The connection between freedom and responsibility is the contract of democracy. When we consider the Gracious Speech today and consider so many of the Government's actions, we and many others say that the Government are not keeping that contract of democracy.

I know that the Prime Minister said last week that sometimes we have to sacrifice a little of the freedom that we cherish to defend the greater freedoms. That is axiomatic. If it was not, we could drive on any side of the road that we liked; all suspects would be free to roam the streets until the trial; and any newspaper could publish any article about any secret without regard to vital interests of national security. If we did not concede some freedoms, we would have less freedom. So much is obvious.

Freedom is not a matter of absolutes; it is a matter of balance. In this country, people of all parties and of no party now consider that that balance is shifting and that the Government are controlling and regulating. They see the ending of the right of silence in a police station and the imposition of a duty of silence in the television station. They see that coming forward in an official secrets Bill which will make it illegal to publish stories which we can read freely now in any serious newspaper. They see that power is being moved relentlessly in favour of the state. They feel that the balance of freedom has swung against the civil servant, the newspaper, the broadcaster and the individual citizen who wants the right to object and the right to know.

Those people who are concerned about the changing balance in our country agree with Edmund Burke: they understand that liberty must be limited in order to be possessed. They do not seek licence, and they do not

[Mr. Kinnock]

support lawlessness, but they want the balance of freedom to be retained and they want the rights of information, privacy and expression to be expanded in this mature democracy, as they are in other democracies. Instead of that, they are convinced, with us, that the shifts in the balance that are taking place do not safeguard, but curtail, essential liberties.

We shall resist those shifts against the rights of the subject in the many Acts that come from the Government. We shall resist with reason and with argument. I put it to Conservative Members, again in the words of Edmund Burke, that all it requires for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing. I appeal to the good people in all parts of the House to join us in stopping the shift to centralisation, control and censorship that is jeopardising liberty in this state, under this Government, with this Prime Minister.

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): First, I join the Leader of the Opposition in warmly congratulating my hon. Friends the Members for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) and for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) on the most excellent speeches that they made in moving and seconding the Loyal Address. My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey is famous for his wit and affability, and his performance today was even better than his reputation. It was an absolutely marvellous speech. I noticed that he was typically modest about his own contribution to government. We miss him very much—*[Interruption.]*—but one of the advantages of being on the Back Benches is that we are able to hear him move a most excellent Loyal Address today.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West on a typically persuasive and thorough speech. I enjoyed it very much. I have a fellow feeling with him, being a London Member, particularly as we suffer from RAWP in the Health Service, as he knows well. It was a most excellent speech and I, too, hope that he will keep his seat for as long as I have kept mine—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I did not wish to interrupt the Leader of the Opposition, but will hon. Members below the Gangway kindly refrain from chatting?

The Prime Minister: Let me deal quickly with some of the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition before making my remarks on the Gracious Speech.

There are now far fewer pensioners on low incomes today than there were—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: There are far fewer pensioners on low incomes today than there were 10 years ago. Ten years ago, 38 per cent. of pensioners were in the bottom one fifth of national income. Today, only 24 per cent. of pensioners are in the bottom fifth—an enormous improvement.

Domestic electricity costs 8·1 per cent. less in real terms today than it did five years ago. But it is quite misleading for the right hon. Gentleman to suggest that we can have all the environmental improvements and all the improvements in electricity and water quality without having to pay the price. Of course there is a price for environmental improvement, and we should believe that it is a price worth paying.

A report by scientific experts which was put before the North sea conference, which was held in Britain, confirmed that the state of the North sea was generally good and that environmental damage was largely confined to localised areas such as the German and Dutch Wadden seas. If people are interested in the cleanliness of rivers, they might turn their attention to cleaning up the Rhine.

With regard to the RUC, I may point out that expenditure in 1986-87 was £319 million—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have drawn to the attention of right hon. and hon. Members seated below the Gangway my views on talking during the speech by the Leader of the Opposition. I now say to those seated above the Gangway, and especially to those who are members of the Opposition Front Bench, that they should not seek to interrupt the Prime Minister.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When my right hon. Friend was speaking, there was noise not only from below the Gangway but from the Government Front Bench, about which you, Mr. Speaker, said nothing. Frankly, I resent the threat that you, Mr. Speaker, make to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Speaker: There is no question of a threat. I say to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), who is a member of the Opposition Front Bench, that he should set a good example.

The Prime Minister: The Leader of the Opposition referred to the resources available to the RUC. In 1986-87, they totalled £319 million. For the current year, 1988-89, £385 million will be available, and next year a figure in the region of £414 million will be available to the RUC. That is a substantial increase in resources for that brave police service.

The right hon. Gentleman referred also to the clinical grading of nurses. Almost half a million nurses, midwives and health visitors will have to be regarded, and nearly £1,000 million has been provided for that purpose by the taxpayer. The overwhelming majority of nurses are very satisfied with their grades. There is a very limited amount of trouble, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health will be seeing the Royal College of Nursing. Most taxpayers do not understand why, when they have provided the amount for that award in full, there is still trouble. We hope that we will get an improvement in the Health Service.

The Leader of the Opposition finished by making the astonishing claim that things are being more centralised. I counter his claim very strongly. In taxation, for example, the Government are taking a smaller proportion of the national income; the right hon. Gentleman wants the Government to take a bigger proportion. In nationalisation, we are privatising and taking powers away from the Government and giving them to the people. In education, we are giving far more powers to parents and taking them away from central Government. In council housing, we are giving far more opportunity to the people to have capital than the Leader of the Opposition would ever have given. In share ownership, more opportunity has come from the Government to the people. All those are movements of power from central Government to the people, giving them far more independence—which is something that Opposition Members cannot stand because they want people to be totally and utterly dependent upon the state for pretty nearly all their needs and wants.

I turn to the Gracious Speech—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to both sides of the House, if we cannot have freedom of speech in this place, where can we have it? We ought to set an example by listening to one another in silence and with mutual respect.

The Prime Minister: The Gracious Speech makes clear the Government's determination to hold to firm and successful economic policies. We shall continue to bear down on inflation, to keep firm control of public spending, and to promote enterprise. Those are the policies that have brought a period of unparalleled prosperity to the British people—prosperity that has been shared by all income groups.

We are now in the eighth successive year of economic growth, averaging over 3 per cent. In terms of output per head in manufacturing we have not yet caught up with our main competitors, but after two whole decades—the 1960s and 1970s—when the United Kingdom was at the bottom of the growth league, in the 1980s we have climbed to the top of the table.

Unemployment has now fallen for 27 months in succession. Over the last year, it has been falling in all regions, and the unemployment rate has fallen faster than in any other major industrial country. Growth has been spread widely across the economy. In particular, manufacturing output is at its highest ever level. These policies have produced extra resources for public spending priorities, such as the Health Service, pensions, the disabled, scientific research, defence and the police services. But total public spending, although it is at record levels, now accounts for less than 40 per cent. of national income—for the first time in over 20 years.

The extra spending has been financed soundly, but combined with lower tax rates. At the same time public borrowing has been eliminated, and we are now on target for a budget surplus of some £10,000 million in the current financial year. As a result, the burden of debt interest will fall, thus releasing more resources within the same total of public expenditure for priority programmes. That is truly a virtuous circle.

The achievements under this Government reflect the new vitality of our economy. This year the number of small businesses is increasing at a rate of nearly 1,000 a week, and since 1980 manufacturing productivity has been growing at over 5 per cent. a year. Under the last Labour Government it averaged only just over 1 per cent. a year. Buoyant investment across all sectors is further strengthening our economic potential.

For the public sector, the plans set out in the Autumn Statement provide an additional £2·25 billion of capital spending next year, taking the total to over £25 billion. For example, there will be £440 million more for public sector housing and £250 million more for water and sewerage investment, taking this year's total capital investment in water to £1,500 million. There will be £220 million more for motorways and trunk roads, taking this year's total capital investment to £1,310 million. There will also be £170 million more for the Health Service.

Investment by the private sector has been growing rapidly. Total private investment in 1987—some £60 billion—was over 15 per cent. higher in real terms than in any year under the last Labour Government. Now, in the first three quarters of 1988, investment by the manufacturing, construction, distribution and financial industries is 13·5 per cent. higher than it was in 1987.

With all the talk about investments by overseas businesses in the United Kingdom, let us not forget that British businesses are expanding their overseas holdings and investments at a far higher rate. In the 12 months to June this year, the value of takeovers by overseas companies in this country was £2,900 million. In the same period, British businesses made over 550 overseas acquisitions, with a value of £13,700 million—over four times as much.

These are investments that are earning—and will continue to earn—a big return for Britain as the revenue from North sea oil diminishes.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the Prime Minister approve of the Australian bid for Scottish and Newcastle Breweries plc and the moving of its major financial headquarters out of Edinburgh?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows that the bid has been referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. He is well aware that while that reference is being considered, it is utterly improper for any Minister to make a statement about the matter.

Industrial profitability has risen every year since 1981, so business today is able to finance a large part of its investment from retained profits. However, the personal sector also needs to save. Considerable attention has rightly been given to the fall in the savings ratio and to the increase in personal borrowing. Much of that extra borrowing is by people who are buying their own homes or by people who are purchasing shares, insurance policies, and so on. However, some of the borrowing has been for the purchase of consumer goods, too many of which are imported—a major factor in the deficit on current account.

If savings and investment are to be kept in reasonable balance, borrowing must be checked, so that non-inflationary growth can be sustained. That is why we have raised interest rates. The highest rates will take time to have their full effect, both to exert downward pressure on inflation and to help reduce the deficit on trade—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: Of course, higher interest rates are unpopular with some people, although they are good for those who save, including many millions of old people. They are the right response because the defeat of inflation is, and will remain, the top priority.

I shall now speak about the legislative programme. The Gracious Speech outlines a full programme of legislation. Its main provisions can be summarised under three headings. First, there are provisions that deal with industry and commerce; secondly, there are those particularly concerned with the care, protection and education of children; and, thirdly, there are measures for safeguarding the security of the realm, fighting terrorism and combating crime and hooliganism, such as the Football Spectators Bill.

[The Prime Minister]

I shall deal first with industry and commerce. Under that heading, we have two major privatisation measures for water and electricity. The Water Bill will be a major environmental measure as well——*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: The Bill will establish a new public body, the National Rivers Authority, to take over the responsibilities of water authorities in England and Wales in relation to controlling and reducing water pollution, resource management, flood defence, fisheries, recreation and navigation. The Water Bill will also establish a new statutory framework for the control of drinking water quality and river quality.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I shall give way at the end of this section.

The Bill will enable the existing water authorities in England and Wales to be replaced by new limited companies, which will then be privatised. It will also provide for the appointment of a director general of water services to keep the services under review and to protect the interests of consumers.

Mr. Simon Hughes: If the Government are so committed to the environment, why do they propose to privatise the water industry, which will make the private consumer pay a considerable amount more, instead of shouldering the burden of expenditure for environmental improvements, which is what the public want? They want the water industry to be retained in public ownership, as they have overwhelmingly argued.

The Prime Minister: The Government have only the taxpayers' money. Some hon. Members speak as if there were some other source of money. If we want environmental improvement, it will cost money. There will soon be environmental improvement concerning nitrates in water. It will be the people who want those improvements in water who will have to pay. It is utterly irresponsible to suggest that we can have those improvements without being prepared to pay the price for them.

An Electricity Bill will be introduced to privatise the electricity supply industry in England, Wales and Scotland.

In England and Wales, in order to promote competition, the Central Electricity Generating Board's generating capacity will be split into two companies. The area electricity boards will also be privatised as 12 independent supply companies, and the national grid will be transferred to a new company jointly owned by the suppliers.

In Scotland there will be two independent companies broadly based upon the existing Scottish electricity boards.

In England and Wales we aim to maintain the proportion of electricity produced from nuclear power at the current level, which would mean four more nuclear power stations, including Sizewell, by the year 2000. That in itself—*[Interruption.]* That in itself—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: I said, "we aim to"—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Of course, if hon. Members had been listening, they would have heard that. Maintaining nuclear power at the current level itself will help to mitigate acid rain and the greenhouse effect. A real culprit in the greenhouse effect is the vast amount of carbon dioxide that is produced from burning coal in power stations.

The two Bills show our determination to secure the advantages of privatisation for each industry, their customers and the taxpayer while at the same time making a major contribution to the establishment of improved environmental standards.

Under the same heading of industry and commerce, the coming Session will also include legislation to transfer the Scottish Bus Group to the private sector. This will give a further boost to enterprise in Scotland and will create new opportunities for employee participation, wider share ownership and investment, which, of course, Opposition Members hate.

A Companies Bill will be introduced to improve and simplify procedures for companies and to improve merger control. The Bill's proposals on merger policy cover voluntary pre-notification of mergers and provision for enforceable undertakings rather than reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Turning to the second area of legislation, which concerns social measures, the House will recall that the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988 extended parental involvement in schools. We now propose to introduce an Education (Scotland) Bill which would extend freedom of choice for parents in the Scottish education system by granting them the right to vote for the removal of their school from the central management of an education authority. The Bill would provide that such a self-governing school would remain publicly funded by direct Government grant and would not be able to charge fees; would be run by a board of governors representative of parents, teachers and the wider community; and would retain its denominational character.

Mr. James Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Is the Prime Minister aware that that measure will be totally abhorrent to the vast majority of people in Scotland and that it will simply reinforce detestation of her and her policies? Is she further aware that in Scotland she now has as much credibility and legitimacy as her new pal, General Jaruzelski, has in Poland?

The Prime Minister: On the latter point, when the hon. Gentleman was a member of the Labour party and the Labour party governed Britain without a majority in England, he did not complain and neither did we because we believe in the United Kingdom. I recognise that he does not.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's comments on the Education (Scotland) Bill, of course he does not want to extend choice to ordinary people—he is a Socialist.

A further important measure will be the Children's Bill which will reform the law on child care and family services. It will take into account the recommendations of the report on child abuse in Cleveland. Children are entitled to protection from harm and abuse, and innocent families from unnecessary intervention by the state.

The Bill will replace the existing fragmented and overlapping provisions on child care and family law. It will improve the procedures governing the removal of children from their homes in emergencies, while strengthening parents' rights to challenge court orders. It will redefine local authorities' responsibilities towards children in need, and address the difficult questions which arose in Cleveland of parental access and medical examinations.

The Bill will also implement reforms in private child law covering custody and guardianship. Taken together, the proposals will form a unified and consistent code in respect of the care and upbringing of children. Nothing could be more important, and I hope that the Bill will have the support of all hon. Members.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Prime Minister set out what might appear at first glimpse to be progressive legislation. Will she give us an absolute guarantee that every social services department in the country that complains today that it has not the staff to monitor even current legislation will be given the money to ensure that it has the staff to carry out that function properly?

The Prime Minister: The money that they receive takes important duties into account. If some local authorities did not waste money on other things, they would have more money to give to important things. It is not only the amount of money but its good use and way in which it is managed.

A major Local Government and Housing Bill will also be brought foward to introduce in England and Wales new arrangements for local authority housing finance and home improvement grants, and local authority capital finance. Additionally, the Bill would give effect to several key proposals contained in the Widdecombe report on the conduct of local authority business.

The third group of measures concern safeguarding the security of the realm and fighting terrorism. Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 will be replaced by a narrower and more closely defined provision. Its aim will be to ensure that the criminal law penalises, and penalises effectively, only those who make unauthorised disclosures of official information which do unacceptable harm to the public interest.

The House had an opportunity to debate the Government's proposals in July, and the Bill that we shall introduce will take account of points in that debate and elsewhere. I believe that the new Bill avoids what are generally accepted to be the unsatisfactory aspects of the old Act and provides a more effective safeguard against the unauthorised disclosure of information.

A Bill will also be introduced to put the Security Service on a statutory basis, under the authority of the Secretary of State. The legislation will set out the functions of the Security Service and will reaffirm ministerial responsibility for the service. It will replace the published 1952 directive to the Director General of the Security Service from the then Home Secretary—known as the Maxwell Fyfe directive. The legislation will follow the structure approved by Parliament in the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

This country owes much to the work and dedication of our security service. The Government believe it is right to provide the service with the authority and clarity of a statute.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): At first sight, the measure seems to be a great improvement. What will it mean in terms of accountability to the House?

The Prime Minister: In precisely the same way as the Home Secretary and myself have always been accountable to the House—*[Interruption.]* We do not, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, ever say anything about operational matters. The right hon. Gentleman knows that Conservative Members always supported his decisions on the security service, even when his own party did not.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I shall make one more point, because I have a lot more to say. It might help.

From what Mr. Speaker said, I understand that the Opposition have chosen to debate home affairs tomorrow. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will then say more about this Bill, which we hope to publish tomorrow so right hon. and hon. Members will be able to see precisely what is in it.

To strengthen our defences against those who preach and practise violence, especially in Northern Ireland, we are taking a number of steps in addition to those already announced. First, we shall introduce a Bill to require candidates in local elections in Northern Ireland to sign a declaration not to support violence. It is deeply offensive to the great majority of people in Northern Ireland that there should be those who openly support and, indeed, advocate violence in local council chambers. The Bill is intended to prevent such statements and activities.

Secondly, we shall be re-enacting the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1984, including the power to exclude known terrorists from part or all of the United Kingdom, as well as the power to arrest and detain those suspected of terrorism.

The Bill will also include new provisions, in three respects. First, it will make it an offence to be involved in handling or holding funds for terrorist purposes. The police will be given new search powers to assist them in tracing those funds and the courts will be able to order their forfeiture when a conviction is obtained. The provisions follow those used successfully against drug traffickers.

Secondly, for Northern Ireland, the Bill will also reduce the remission granted to prisoners servicing sentences of five years or over for terrorist offences from one half to one third of their sentence.

Thirdly, the Bill will provide that anyone out on remission from a sentence of more than one year, who is then convicted of a terrorist offence, will have to serve the full unexpired portion of his earlier sentence as well as whatever new sentence is given.

Those provisions will mean that those found guilty of terrorism will spend longer in prison. They should act as a further deterrent to those who contemplate acts of terrorism and violence.

The Government are determined never to give in to the terrorist, but to do everything in their power to defend society against terrorism. We hope that our determination will enjoy the unanimous support of the House. But I have to note that right hon. and hon. Members opposite have consistently voted against the existing legislation. I believe that this is seen by the terrorists and their supporters as a sign of weakness. I hope that those Opposition Members will take the opportunity to correct that impression, and to demonstrate that they share the Government's determination to deal firmly with terrorism, by voting for the Bill.

[The Prime Minister]

The Gracious Speech reaffirms the Government's determination to maintain strong and effective defences while striving to break down the barriers between East and West. There is no contradiction between those aims: indeed, they complement each other. It is a sense of security which gives countries the confidence to negotiate and discuss their differences. If we adopted the policies advocated by the Opposition, there would be no need for others to negotiate with us, because they would be able to get all they wanted without it. Fortunately, the Government take very seriously their responsibility to maintain and update our defences, especially while the Soviet Union's military strength continues to expand with ever more sophisticated weapons.

Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): Does my right hon. Friend realise that there is some concern about keeping the level of conventional forces sufficiently strong to deter, as she suggested in her last remarks? There is some concern, too, about the replacement for the Chieftain tank. Can my right hon. Friend tell the House when we will have a decision on whether the order willl go to the British company, Vickers, or to the American company, General Dynamics?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, in the Alliance we are trying to secure unified proposals to negotiate with the Soviet Union on conventional weapons.

Secondly, a decision has yet to be taken on the replacement of the Chieftain tank, but I do not expect that it wil be very long before we take it.

Thirdly, the provisions announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his Autumn Statement mean that the defence budget will grow by nearly £1 billion a year over the next three years. That is the measure of the Government's determination to ensure that our forces have the most modern and up-to-date equipment, both nuclear and conventional. I hope that those who criticise Britain for not being sufficiently European will reflect that, when it comes to making a real contribution to Europe—both our financial contribution to the Community and our military contribution to the defence of Europe beyond our own borders—we are second to none.

I was able to discuss many of those issues with Vice-President Bush during my visit to Washington last week. I am glad to say that he wants to see the special relationship between Britain and the United States continue in all its strength, including, of course, the arrangements for Trident, which is so vital to our defence. It was clear, too, from my talks that our views and those of the new Administration on all the main issues of defence, arms control and East-West relations will continue to be very close indeed.

At the same time, Britain is in the forefront of efforts to overcome East-West divisions. My own recent visit to Poland—welcomed by both the Polish Government and by Solidarity; indeed, by everyone except the Labour party—is evidence of that. What the Labour party cannot bear is that one can go to eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, believing in strong defence, ready to speak up for our democratic beliefs and for human rights, and still receive a warm welcome.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On the subject of travelling around the world, if the Prime Minister believes that it is right for her to have spent, I think, £5 million of the taxpayers' money during the past nine years, why is she stopping the Queen from going to Russia?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we do not discuss this matter. The matter has not been addressed in any way at all—*[Interruption.]* It is completely hypothetical.

The official visit of President Gorbachev and Mrs. Gorbachev in December will be another opportunity to discuss how we can take forward our aim of more peaceful and stable relations, as well as to hear more about his plans for reform in the Soviet Union. The visit is further evidence of the weight which Britain's views on all these matters now carry in the world. It is the result of the Government's success in rebuilding our economy, strengthening our defences and restoring our reputation—success which will make the years ahead great ones for this country.

The first Session of this Parliament was the fourth longest this century—it enacted 44 Government measures. The coming Session will be shorter, but it is a full programme which carries forward our policies and our commitments in a number of important areas. I commend it to the House.

4.8 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I have the pleasure in joining the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister in congratulating the mover and the seconder of the Loyal Address. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) made an interesting speech. I must say, however, that I found it difficult to recognise his description of the Government as one who have buttressed and protected freedom, but I can no doubt return to that in a moment.

The hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) made a brilliant speech, which many of us will remember, in which he showed all that engaging humour and wit which those who know him so well value so highly. I particularly welcomed the hon. Gentleman's comments about the environment. I do not believe that I paraphrase him too inaccurately by saying that he said that there was a difference between a general desire to succeed with the environment and the specific policies that would achieve an effective outcome.

I deplore the contempt—frankly, that is the only word that I can use—with which the Government have treated both Houses of Parliament by their handling of the Gracious Speech. That contempt is evident because Her Majesty was asked to turn up in the other place today to read a Gracious Speech that had been extensively leaked, in outline and in detail, in every paper during the past two weeks. If the Government plan to maintain that deplorable practice, perhaps they could save Her Majesty the trouble next year and simply get Bernard Ingham to come here to read the speech.

It gives me no satisfaction to say that the first Gracious Speech to which I have to respond as a party leader will be known more for the opportunities that it has missed than for the importance of its programme. Of course, it gives the House a heavy legislative programme. It would be quite out of character of the Government if it did not, for they have been the most interfering and dominating of all recent Governments.

The proposed programme reveals the new phase of Thatcherism—we might call it the right hon. Lady's cultural revolution. It is a time when unthinking dogma is more important than effective legislation. As we know, the Government like nothing better than to have an enemy.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I develop my speech further before I give way. If he would like to intervene later, I shall be happy to consider his request. *[Interruption.]* I was only being courteous to the hon. Gentleman. I hope that he accepts that.

The Government's first enemies were the trade unions, then there was the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, then Arthur Scargill, then Left-wing local government, then all local government, then the universities, then Peter Wright, and finally, of course, the pensioners.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way at the moment.

Suddenly, the Prime Minister seems to lack an enemy. I thought for a brief and hopeful moment that the pillaging and despoliation of our environment would become her new enemy.

Mr. Barry Field: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker How am I to know when the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) is far enough in his speech to allow me to intervene?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should listen.

Mr. Ashdown: No doubt the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) will know when he tries and I give way.

I thought for a brief and hopeful moment that the attacks on our environment would become the Prime Minister's new enemy. I thought that she might honour that famous headline in *The Daily Telegraph* and lead a crusade to preserve the planet. I thought that she might roll over her Secretary of State for the Environment, just as she has removed all other obstacles to her will. Yet I can find nothing in the Gracious Speech to fulfil the Prime Minister's original promise. I find nothing to suggest that the right hon. Lady takes this real enemy and the threat to our future seriously.

We must conclude that the Prime Minister's brief conversion to the environment was more to do with polling data than a Pauline conversion. Perhaps we should not be too surprised, for we all know that we have benefited far too little from her conversion to St. Francis of Assisi.

Mr. Barry Field *rose—*

Mr. Ashdown: All right. I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Field: Given the hon. Gentleman's dislike of leaks from the Gracious Speech, I wonder whether we can count on his party's support for the reform of the Official Secrets Act 1911.

Mr. Ashdown: No. The hon. Gentleman will discover why in a few moments.

Whatever our view of the Prime Minister's commitment to the environment, it is clear that, given the recent utterances of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) in the House and outside, my party—along with, I suspect, most people in Britain—has absolutely no confidence in his new-found role as guardian of our precious environment.

I welcome the recent improvements in international relations and I wish the Government well in their dealings with President Gorbachev and President-elect Bush. Why is it, however, that the passage in the Gracious Speech on defence and East-West relations echoes the same old rhetoric of previous years, as though nothing has happened since 1950? Thanks to Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev, the world is changing. Everything is different—except, of course, the attitude of the Government, who remain, as ever, frozen in the bleak rhetoric of the cold war era. That is why it would be a disgrace if the Prime Minister vetoed the possibility of the Queen's visiting Moscow. Given Her Majesty's experience, there would be much to gain and nothing whatever to lose from such a visit. Frankly, the public will not have been impressed by the Government's decision to make their advice known to Buckingham palace through the medium of Sunday newspapers.

As a belated signal of their recognition of the new opportunities for peace, I hope that the Government will join West Germany and France in resisting the modernisation of nuclear weapons in Europe. In common with many, I believe that to modernise now would be folly just when real steps towards disarmament are in prospect.

Recent progress in international relations stands in stark contrast to the latest news about our economic performance. As the Prime Minister has rightly argued, responsible management of the economy is one of the prime tests of good government, and a responsible Government would act very differently towards the economy from the way in which the present Government are acting. A responsible Government would have had the courage to admit that they had miscalculated on the economy in the previous Budget and were prepared to alter course. A responsible Government would have accepted that, after nine years of Tory rule, we are no nearer solving the problems of the United Kingdom's performance in world markets.

The figures tell the whole sad story. Our inflation rate now stands at 6·4 per cent., four times the West German figure, and half as high again as the EEC average. Our interest rates are two and a half times those of France, and more than three times those of West Germany. Our wage rates are increasing at well over the European average. Our overall investment is still well below the EEC average. Meanwhile, our balance of payments deficit is running at a record level and will be three or four times what the Chancellor of the Exchequer predicted a mere seven months ago. In the face of such a lethal combination of figures, why is it that the Chancellor is just about the only person in Britain who does not recognise the potential dangers ahead?

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Given that the hon. Gentleman is outlining the position of his party, I wonder whether he is speaking for all its Members, or whether the semi-detached Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) is in danger of becoming fully detached? Can he tell us what name his party is now trading under, as we are becoming extremely confused about that?

Mr. Ashdown: I am sorry to be discourteous to the hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), but his question must be treated with the contempt that it deserves.

We shall oppose the privatisation of water. The two inevitable results of that foolish legislation will be that the consumer will lose and charges will rise, probably by a massive amount. Presumably that will be the first fruit of the Government's curious new phrase, found in the Gracious Speech, about bearing down on inflation.

We shall also oppose the Government's plans for electricity. They will not lead to real improved competition, and the regulatory structure, as with British Telecom, will doubtless prove inadequate. My party has never believed that the ownership of an enterprise is the key criterion. After all, with regard to service to the consumer, there is nothing to choose between British Telecom's performance as a private monopoly and what it used to give us as a public corporation. The real questions are not who owns, but how is the consumer served? How is competition improved? How is the public interest best protected? On all three questions, the Government's proposals for water and electricity privatisation comprehensively fail the test.

The proposals will also ensure that this year will see further inroads into our freedoms. Frankly, it ill becomes the Prime Minister to lecture the world about freedom when she now heads a Government who are so careless with our liberties.

If the proposed legislation on the Official Secrets Act follows the recent White Paper—nothing that the Prime Minister said could lead us to any other conclusion—it will result, not in more freedom of information, but in further restrictions, tighter controls and more sanctions in the hands of the Government. Similarly, while my party supports the need for a Prevention of Terrorism Act as a temporary measure for Northern Ireland, we shall oppose the Government's attempts to make it a permanent feature of the British legal system. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Let me tell Conservative Members why. We do not accept the Government's defeatist attitude that terrorism must be viewed as a permanent state of affairs in Britain. That is why.

However, I am happy to welcome in principle the Government's proposals to require a declaration from candidates in Northern Ireland that they will not support terrorism. I have to support such a piece of legislation, as it is something that I recommended to the Prime Minister in a letter that I wrote to her earlier this year.

My party also welcomes a statutory basis for the security services. The Prime Minister almost removed that welcome with a single sentence when, in answering a question during her speech, she said that the parliamentary accountability that would be attached would be the same as the House has enjoyed—or should I say which it has been denied—by herself and the Secretary of State responsible. We welcome the prosposal as a step forward. As the House will expect, we shall press for proper parliamentary accountability of the security services, which we want to see vested in a carefully chosen cross-party Select Committee drawn from membership of the Privy Council.

The most important message from the Gracious Speech, however, is not one of unwise legislation. It is chiefly one of lost opportunities. Here are a Government who claim a mandate, in so far as our twisted electoral system can ever supply one. Here are a Government who claim that they are radical, yet they have failed to produce a single coherent idea of what we need to do now if we are to meet the challenges of the next decades. On the eve of 1992, and with a new President about to enter the White House, only a fool would be complacent about our trading performance and our rising inflation.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way just now.

A responsible Government would have announced their intention to put the health of our economy before further cuts in taxation in the next Budget. Why was that not specifically mentioned? A responsible Government would have committed themselves to membership of the European monetary system and taken action to rein in the expansion of mortgage and credit lending. They would have taken the necessary measures to encourage savings. All those things could have been in the Gracious Speech, but none is.

A radical Government would not have sat back in the face of the destitution and homelessness in Britain—9 million people are now living at or below the poverty line, and 112,000 were homeless last year. A radical Government would by now have started work on integrating our tax and benefit systems. They would have released some of the money locked up in council budgets to build more homes. They would have responded to the challenge of the Griffiths report on community care, rather than letting it fester on the shelf. All those things could have been in the Government's programme, but none is.

A Government who were serious about the environment would have taken this opportunity to get to grips with the environmental crisis facing our country and the world, but all that we have is rhetoric—fine words, but grubby actions. The Natural Environment Research Council is still being starved of funds, and now we hear of top-level resignations at the Department of the Environment in protest at inadequate resourcing and bureaucratic frustration. The Secretary of State's view is that we should do nothing until he is personally 100 per cent. convinced. He argues that it is better to wait than to do anything hasty.

The Prime Minister quoted from the North sea summit of November 1987. I should like the right hon. Lady to contrast the attitude of her Secretary of State with the words of the Prince of Wales at that conference:

> "If science has taught us anything, it is that the environment is full of uncertainty. It makes no sense to test it to destruction. While we wait for the doctor's diagnosis, the patient may easily die!"

A Government who were serious about combating the environmental threat would now join the 30 per cent. club. They would do more to promote energy conservation. They would use the power of the taxation system to provide real encouragement for the use of unleaded petrol. They would introduce legislation to improve control over vehicle emissions. They would tighten up the cross-border shipment of hazardous wastes. They would commit themselves to a decent policy for public transport. All those things could have been in the Government's programme, but none is.

The trouble with the Government is that they clearly have no trust in the people. They have no argument against a Freedom of Information Bill except the political convenience of the Executive. They have no case against a plural and democratic system of local government except the authorisation of central Government. They have no reason for refusing political and institutional reform except the fear that any change would lift the suffocating blanket of control that the Government have thrown over everything and everybody in Britain. It has always struck me as peculiarly ironic that it was a Conservative peer, Lord Hailsham, who warned against the threat of an elective dictatorship, and a Conservative Government who made it a reality.

A Government who looked to the 1990s would recognise that the modern citizen will expect a greater role in decision-making and a more open system of government. They would see that our United Kingdom would be stronger and our democracy healthier if we had elected Parliaments for the nations of Scotland and Wales. They would recognise that a full commitment to Europe is the best way to secure Britain's long-term interests. They would understand that the development of democratic Europewide institutions is not just necessary, but inevitable. They would know that we cannot preserve our appalling electoral system without damaging our democracy itself.

This is a programme of missed opportunities. We are missing opportunities to safeguard the environment. We are missing opportunities to strengthen our industrial base and improve our research and development potential. We are missing opportunities to co-ordinate foreign policy initiatives. We are missing opportunities to raise standards for the consumer. We are missing opportunities to tackle poverty, which blights the lives of so many of our fellow citizens.

This is a programme from a Government dominated by the poverty of their public spirit and their narrowness of the view of Britain's role in the world. It is a programme that is all about dogma—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, it is. It is a programme that is all dogma and no vision. It is a programme that will damage further the quality of our life, divide further our already sadly divided nation, deplete further the strength of our already weakened democracy and do nothing to prepare Britain for the future.

4.28 pm

Mr. David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for calling me at this very early point in the new Session.

Last Tuesday marked the end of a Session of Parliament during which, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, a great deal of legislation reached the statute book. The Gracious Speech suggests that there is another heavy programme of legislation before us. Before the 1979 general election, I remember being told by my right hon. and hon. Friends in the then shadow Cabinet that there had been too much legislation in this country and that a Conservative Government would mean less legislation in the future. Alas, that is one election promise that has not been fulfilled. However, being of an optimistic disposition, I have not given up hope that eventually the promise may be fulfilled—who knows, perhaps next year. It is not that I have any great dispute with the details of most of the proposed legislation in the Gracious Speech, but I believe that there is too much and that it might have been advantageous if it could have been spread over two or three Sessions.

I particularly welcome the Bill on the care and protection of children. In recent years, there have been a number of worrying cases, including the scandal of Cleveland. The protection of children, compatible with fairness and justice to parents, is essential in any society and should have a high priority in a society that calls itself civilised.

I welcome the Bill on the security services. There has been some public concern about the activities of the security services in recent years and I hope that the Bill will bring them under proper control and reassure people.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The hon. Gentleman says that he hopes that the proposals on the security services will deal with the doubts and difficulties that many of us have about whether they are impartial. Does he agree that the most effective way to overcome our difficulties is to have parliamentary scrutiny—hence a Select Committee?

Mr. Knox: It would be wise to wait for the publication of the Bill, which I understand will be tomorrow, before passing any detailed judgment on it.

I was pleased to hear that the Bill to privatise the electricity industry is to be introduced in this Session. It will enable the industry to escape the clutches of Treasury control. The Bill will introduce a little more competition. Clearly, the industry cannot be totally competitive, but there will be more competition than at present. Both those things should help to contribute to a more efficient electricity industry. Hopefully, the privatisation will give a further boost to share ownership in Britain.

I was also pleased about the legislation on improvement grants. I hope that the Bill will cover those in defective houses formerly owned by the Coal Board—the people who do not receive help to remedy housing defects. I am thinking particularly of people in my constituency who did not buy their houses direct from the Coal Board and knew nothing about the defects when they bought them.

I have some reservations about the proposed football national membership scheme. Those of us who are interested in and care about football have been concerned about the violence that has manifested itself in recent years at football matches. Measures have been taken to deal with that and considerable success has been achieved so far. What worries me about the membership scheme is that, although it will provide greater control inside football grounds, it will leave troublemakers outside the grounds. Since it is much easier to police potential hooligans in confined areas rather than on the streets and in town centres, I am afraid that the overall effect of the scheme may be more hooliganism, and hooliganism which is less easy to control. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will have another look at the proposal, because I know that it is causing concern among football clubs and the police.

However important Ministers may regard legislative proposals, the Government will be judged in the coming Session on the performance of the British economy. When I spoke in the debate on the Gracious Speech in June last year, I expressed some criticisms about manufacturing output and unemployment and commended the Government on their record on inflation and the balance

[Mr. Knox]

of payments. I suppose it tells one something about the nature of economic problems that this year I wish to commend the Government's record on manufacturing output and unemployment and to express concern about inflation and the balance of payments, particularly the latter.

Over the past year, the index of manufacturing output has risen from 108 to 115·5—an increase of about 7 per cent. Over the past two years, the index has risen by over 13 per cent.; by any standard, that is a fast growth rate. Of course, we ought not to become too carried away, because we have been catching up on lost ground. It is as well to remember that the index in September this year was only five points higher than in September 1974—14 years ago.

There has been a significant improvement in unemployment during the past two years. The number out of work has fallen from just over 3 million in October 1986 to just over 2 million this October. That reduction is welcome but—I am sure that this will receive general agreement throughout the House—there are still too many people out of work. We have a long way to go before unemployment is down to the level of the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s.

Both manufacturing output and unemployment have been moving strongly in the right direction during the past two years. Unfortunately, the progress made in those spheres has not been repeated for inflation. During the past year, the annual rate of inflation has increased from 4·5 per cent. to 6·4 per cent. I do not believe that that deterioration is a matter for grave concern but it obviously calls for action, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has taken. However, I am sorry that he has confined himself to the use of interest rates to squeeze out inflation. In some circumstances, interest rates have a part to play, but, because of the damage caused by the side effects of high interest rates, I wish that he had used some other weapons on this occasion.

One aspect of our current inflation is a cause for concern. In the past, inflationary pressure tended to appear only in conditions of over-full employment—when unemployment fell below about 350,000. The current inflation, caused to some extent by an increase in earnings of 9 per cent. in the past year, has taken place when unemployment is in excess of 2 million. Despite that large pool of unemployed people and the freeing of the labour market, which has resulted from the Government's trade union legislation and other measures, we have an over-heated labour market and, as a consequence, wage and salary cost inflation.

Despite all that has happened, we seem to be even further from resolving the great unresolved economic problem of the post-war era, which is how to maintain a high level of employment and, at the same time, control inflation. Could it be that there is a case for an incomes policy after all?

The really serious economic problem facing Britain today is the balance of payments. Since the Budget in March, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has had to increase his estimate of the current account deficit from £4 billion to £13 billion. I am not over-critical of his forecasting, because I have always been suspicious and wary of economic forecasts. A deficit of £4 billion was bad enough. A deficit of £13 billion is very serious. It shows that the United Kingdom economy is once again uncompetitive.

One of the great advantages of North sea oil has been that it has enabled us as a nation to build up large overseas investments. That has made us one of the strongest creditor countries in the world, with substantially larger investments in other countries than foreigners have in this country. There can be little doubt that our strong international capital position enabled us to withstand the fall in oil prices over the last two years without too much short-term trouble. Our strong international capital position is also enabling us to run a large current account deficit without short-term difficulties at present. But it is not desirable that we should continue to run a large deficit, even if that is possible—which I doubt.

Apart from its destabilising effect on international trade, a large current account deficit is undesirable because it must be financed either by the sale of overseas assets or by the inflow of overseas funds attracted by high interest rates. Either way, this adversely affects our net capital position, and if it is allowed to continue for too long it will result in Britain ceasing to be a net creditor country. If that happened, we would have to pay out more in interest to foreigners than we would receive from our remaining overseas investments. To put it mildly, such a situation would be deeply alarming.

Early action to reduce and eventually to eliminate the deficit is urgent. Unfortunately, the policies being pursued to deal with inflation can only make it more difficult to remedy the balance of payments deficit because the policy of high interest rates has the effect of keeping sterling at an unrealistically high level against other currencies. As a consequence, British exports are dearer in world markets and therefore more difficult to sell, while imports into Britain are cheaper and easier to sell. In such circumstances, it is impossible to reduce, far less eliminate, the balance of payments deficit. If we are to right the current account of our balance of payments, there must be a reduction in the exchange rate of sterling against other currencies. That means that interest rates must be allowed to fall and that other measures must be used to restrain inflation. If that does not happen, the deficit will continue and will eventually become insupportable, with devastating consequences for the British economy.

As a contribution to returning to surplus on the current account of the balance of payments, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will refrain from making further tax cuts. That is because tax cuts almost always result in higher consumer spending. In principle there is nothing wrong with that—it is desirable—but unfortunately, in recent years, a disproportionate amount of consumer spending has been directed to imported goods. That trend has been aggravated, but not entirely explained, by the exchange rate problem about which I have spoken. For that reason alone, the tax cuts in the last two Budgets were, in my view, errors of judgment.

If my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has any surplus in the spring, I hope that he will devote it to capital expenditure on the infrastructure, where the import potential is very low or non-existent, rather than to tax cuts. Only in that way can he ensure that total effective demand in the economy as a whole will be maintained at a level that will ensure that unemployment continues to fall, while at the same time avoiding further burdens on the balance of payments. When eventually the current account of the balance of payments is in surplus once more, no one will support tax cuts more strongly than I. Further tax cuts before that happy day is reached would be a profound mistake.

I shall now turn to the European Community. The most important votes that I have registered in the House since I came here in 1970 were in 1971 and 1972, on the issue of principle of British membership of the Community and on the Second and Third Readings of the Bill that took Britain into the European Community. Naturally, I voted in favour of our entry to the Community, and I am pleased and proud that I did so. The House recently debated the Single European Act. In the coming Session, we shall be concerned with implementing it and thus preparing for 1992—the year when all obstacles to trade, finance and movement in the Community are removed. There is nothing very dramatic in the Single European Act. Everything in it, and much more, was originally agreed at the Heads of Government meeting in October 1972. It is regrettable that it is taking us so long to complete the task of creating a real common market in the Community. However, at least we are moving strongly in the right direction.

Undoubtedly, 1992 offers tremendous opportunities to British industry. The Government are right to devote great efforts to impressing on everyone the importance of preparing for 1992. The benefits of 1992 are not automatic. They will be gained only after great effort on the part of those in industry, commerce and finance who are preparing themselves to be more competitive. During the summer recess, I was impressed by the level of awareness of firms in my constituency about the opportunities of 1992. That augurs well for the future but, of course, there is no room for complacency. As I have said, success will depend on people in industry, commerce and finance, but, the Government too have a part to play. Perhaps I could suggest three steps that the Government might take.

First, Britain should join the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. The volatility of sterling creates for British Industry considerable difficulties, which most of our European partners do not experience. Membership of the exchange rate mechanism would give greater exchange rate stability, although not absolute stability, for all our trade in Europe, and that would make life much easier for British industry.

Secondly, the Government should drop their opposition to the abandonment of frontier controls in the Community. To get rid of those controls would enable trade and labour to flow more freely between Britain and the rest of the Community, and that would be to our great advantage. The abandonment of frontier controls does not mean abandoning the battle against drugs and terrorism. That battle must be pursued more ruthlessly than ever, but frontier controls are not necessary for that. The Americans manage without barriers between states, so why not all of Europe? The real answer to drugs and terrorism is to co-ordinate activities throughout the Community to ensure that drug traffickers and terrorists are brought to justice.

Thirdly, the Government and the House should give much stronger support to the European Parliament and especially to our Members of that Parliament. Britain has a vast experience of parliamentary democracy. Surely we should be taking a lead in the development of the European Parliament, in order to make it a better, more effective and more democratic institution, able to play a fuller role in monitoring, scrutinising and controlling Community activities.

For the past 40 years, we have been reluctant Europeans, yet our future is in Europe. The more we put into it, the more we will get out of it. The Community will develop and grow, no matter what we think. The choice for Britain is whether we play a part in guiding that development and growth in directions that will be to our advantage and to the advantage of the Community, or whether we continue to respond to developments, initiated and framed by others, which may not always be to Britain's advantage. I believe that in future we should play a much more positive role in the European Community; it is one of the most exciting developments in human history.

4.48 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Nothing in the Gracious Speech or in the Prime Minister's explanation of it will be of any benefit to women. Much of the Gracious Speech is positively and chillingly damaging to women. During the debate my hon. Friends will eloquently destroy the Government's case, so I intend to devote my speech to outlining an alternative Queen's Speech—a Queen's Speech for women. In doing this, I have the full support of my trade union, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. USDAW's support is based on its close knowledge of the needs of women and of the burden carried by them.

It is ironic that working conditions for most women have worsened under the regime of the right hon. Lady the Prime Minister. Some 63 per cent. of my union's members are women. It may be a surprise to the press and Tory Members, who like to portray trade unions as macho and male-dominated, but my union has a majority of women and we know about the needs of women.

Would it not have been refreshing to hear a Queen's Speech which began by saying that the Government, having at last realised that women form a majority of the population but that they have low incomes, few opportunities and little power, have now decided to use more of the nation's resources to redress this unfair balance? That would be justified for the sake of women and, in addition, would be of immediate benefit to children. Such measures would ultimately be to the benefit of men as well as women and children, because they would create a fairer and happier nation.

Some of the changes would involve new attitudes, especially by the Government and others in authority. Other changes would need more resources, both financial and human. Both of these are available. This is a rich country, which has been devoting far too many resources to making rich people richer.

A Queen's Speech for women will include the following points. I shall say "will" rather "would" because all of them will come about, and the sooner the better. So a Queen's Speech for women will say that a Ministry for women will be established; that it will be headed by a Cabinet Minister, who will introduce legislation, and that it will also have the power and the duty to examine all Government policies for their impact on women and ensure alteration when necessary. For this purpose, it will have outposts in each Government Department. The Treasury will no longer reign supreme. Such a Ministry will inform women about Government actions and ask for

[Mrs. Audrey Wise]

their views, and, for these purposes, will set up regional offices. It will work with local government when necessary and with a strengthened Equal Opportunities Commission.

Women now form a large percentage of the work force, and this is increasing, but they are concentrated in low-wage sectors and in the lowest wage portions of all sectors. The increasing use of casual and part-time workers leaves many women without the employment rights protection that most men have. A statutory minimum wage for adults will therefore be introduced, pro rata for part-timers and trainees. The trade unions and employers will be consulted on timing and phasing and high priority will be given to eliminating low wages. A standard working week of 35 hours will be established.

Employment rights will be extended to all part-timers, regardless of the number of their working hours, and to home workers. Casual work will be restricted. Properly protected job sharing will be encouraged. Part-time workers will have access to training. Men who wish to share in child care will have access to part-time work.

Employers will be expected to take positive action against unfair discrimination and lack of opportunity and to negotiate equal pay for work of equal value.

The Government and local government will use contract compliance as a means of encouraging good employment practices.

Parental and paternity leave will become rights. Maternity rights will be strengthened and financed by a levy on all employers so as to help small businesses and those employing large numbers of women.

Education and training opportunities for women will be improved.

Varied and appropriate facilities for the under-fives are essential both for the children themselves and for their mothers. Resources will be made available to provide nursery education for all who want it. Grants will be available, through local councils, for parents and voluntary bodies to establish varied provisions such as play groups. Income tax on workplace nurseries will be removed.

The full use of schools by the whole community outside school hours will be encouraged, as will the provision of varied facilities for children during school holidays. This will ensure truly economic use of buildings and parks.

These are all modest demands and modest proposals for a country as rich as ours.

More health and safety inspectors will be appointed, and they will pay more attention to problems experienced by women at work, such as those connected with repetitive movement.

Good health requires more than medical services. Poverty, unemployment and bad housing afflict all too many people, and the nation's health is damaged. Therefore, major steps will be taken to reduce these, and thus the incidence of ill health.

The National Health Service is an asset to the nation and an efficient way of providing medical services. More resources will therefore be provided. Health service workers of all kinds and grades will have good pay and conditions. Although women will benefit greatly from an improved Health Service, both as workers in it and users of it, there are also matters more specific to women which require urgent attention. The maternity services will be reorganised to place emphasis on meeting the wishes of mothers, on continuity of care, and on the full use and recognition of midwives' skills. We will no longer have the spectacle of midwives protesting about the degrading effect of the regrading proposals. An insult to midwives is an insult to all women.

Benefits will be adjusted to ensure that all expectant mothers can afford suitable food. More home-help provision will be available for new mothers.

The rundown of family planning facilities will be reversed, and women requiring legal abortion will be treated on the NHS. Infertile couples will receive as much help as possible. Many women feel they are fobbed off with tranquillisers. Better solutions, both medical and social, will be researched so that they will be offered more positive help instead, and progress in reducing tranquilliser use will be monitored.

Well woman centres will be established in each area, and may vary according to the wishes of local women. Self-help groups will be encouraged.

Steps will be taken so that all women who wish to do so will be able to see a woman doctor. Training and career patterns will be adjusted to facilitate this.

Ethnic minorities will have translation help, and food to which they are accustomed to aid their recovery when in hospital.

Community care will be greatly improved. The contribution to the national economy made by carers—worth about £6 billion—will be fully recognised through suitable help and support.

Discussion with professional bodies will start, in order to widen the scope of the NHS to include complementary therapies such as osteopathy. Much emphasis will be laid on prevention and on positive health targets, but this will be done not by exhortation by Ministers but by practical steps.

Consumers are seeking healthier foods. The production of such food will be increased by offering help to encourage growers and farmers to turn to organic methods. This will replace previous Government encouragement of methods that damage the soil, may not be healthy and, in the case of livestock production, are cruel.

Consumer law will be changed to give better labelling and other improvements. The distributive trades will be expected to give better training so that shop work is seen as skilled and helpful to consumers.

Women's needs, both as users and workers, will be taken fully into account in the planning of shopping and other developments.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I apologise to my hon. Friend for having missed the opening of her speech. Will she consider the need to reduce the recommended time between cervical smear tests and join me in urging the Merseyside regional health authority to improve its cervical smear test service?

Mrs. Wise: As I think I have made clear, the needs of women's health, which include screening, would be fully addressed in a Queen's Speech such as I am suggesting.

Better public transport will become a priority. It is essential for women, who have less access than men to private cars, and it will reduce congestion and pollution for everyone.

Local government services are particularly important to women. Previous policies will be reversed so as to work in partnership with local government in future instead of trying to flatten it. In particular, the poll tax will be repealed. It would have been a huge burden on women and on people on low and average incomes in general.

Social security will be improved. Child benefit will be increased and index-linked. Pensions will be increased, concessionary transport made nationwide and extra services given to those over 80 or becoming frail. Women form a high proportion—two thirds—of pensioners and so will be particularly helped by these measures.

Homelessness has more than doubled in the past eight years. Steps will be taken to reverse that trend, and bed-and-breakfast accommodation will no longer be used for homeless families. Women and babies will no longer walk the streets. Repair and improvement of the housing stock will be a priority and resources will be made available for it.

We will look for ways of reducing violence against women and in general.

In foreign affairs, the Government will pursue policies for a less violent and more peaceful world. They will pursue a non-nuclear defence policy. They will devote more resources to constructive help to relieve starvation and suffering in the Third world. To be most effective in that, they will give particular help to women's projects, because women usually carry the greatest burdens and have the least power.

The Government will bring such other measures before the House as are necessary for the well-being of women and, through them, of all citizens.

When we hear such a Queen's Speech, we will know that we have once again a civilised Government and that we are on the way to a fairer and happier nation.

5.3 pm

Mr. Tom Arnold (Hazel Grove): For one awful moment, while listening to the speech of the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), I thought that we were back in the 1974-79 Parliament, in which I was on the Opposition Benches and the hon. Lady was on this side. Once again she is proposing the remedies, as she sees them, of tax and spend which finally produced the convulsion that triggered the general election of 1979, since when, I am happy to say, we have been in office.

I reject the programme that the hon. Lady has outlined to the House and welcome most warmly the Queen's Speech, the second of this Parliament. I am grateful for the opportunity to address the House so early in the Session, not least because the economic policies set out in the Queen's Speech go a long way towards reassuring those of us who may have had some doubts recently about the Government's resolve to stand firm.

I was delighted that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister went to the United States last week, because the relationship between my right hon. Friend and President-elect Bush will be of signal importance in the years ahead. In some respects, the policies that are being urged on my right hon. Friend and on President-elect Bush are, according to many commentators, the same—and they are wrong. The American economy has been growing for 72 months and has been paralleled by a tremendous growth in American prosperity. Our economy has been growing for eight years, yet we can hardly pick up a newspaper at the moment, or listen to a political speech by our opponents and by many so-called neutral commentators, without reading or hearing that the time has come for taxes to be raised both in the United States and in the United Kingdom.

I reject that approach, because it would strike at the very roots of confidence that have been important in sustaining the recent growth in employment and output. To increase taxation in Britain and the United States would produce the very result that we should seek to avoid—a lack of confidence and a move towards recession. I cannot conceive that it is right for the British economy to take any steps that could possibly bring about a situation in which recent growth is halted and we go into a period of economic decline, yet those policies are being urged upon us by newspaper commentators and others, including many hon. Members.

I therefore welcome the clear statement in the Queen's Speech that the Government will seek to move their economic policy in a direction where further cuts in taxation will be possible. No Conservative Member need ever be defensive about the desirability of, or need for, cuts in taxation, because high taxes blunt incentive. We have seen that time and again. The lesson of the past eight years is that we must keep moving forward in the broad direction that we have outlined.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): What is the point of having tax cuts one month when, the following month, there is a rise in interest rates which attacks the living standards of many people?

Mr. Arnold: The trend over a period is important. Since 1979 we have sought progressively to reduce the burden of taxation on our economy and, with it, the proportion of national income taken by the public sector. That is our philosophy, and it is in complete contrast with the philosophy of the hon. Member for Preston.

The introductory passages to the domestic section of the Queen's Speech underline the need for us to stand firm on the principles of our last election manifesto and not to move in the direction urged by other people. If we stand firm and move ahead on the lines suggested, we can continue to look forward to considerable economic and political success.

The honeymoon period enjoyed by the Government has been the longest of any Government since the war, and, as we go into 1989, we will be in an excellent position to do well in the European elections, the importance of which my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) stressed. However, we could not sustain a position that would be comfortable in terms of conducting an election campaign if we went back on our undertakings and introduced policies of the kind that he suggests—with all due respect to him—including increases in taxation and, God forbid, the introduction of a statutory prices and incomes policy.

We must do everything that we can to continue to foster and encourage an enterprise economy of the kind that we have been working hard of late to produce. In that sense, unlike Opposition Members, I welcome the proposal in the Queen's Speech to

> "remove unnecessary obstacles to employment, particularly in relation to women and young people, and to alter training arrangements."

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us exactly what obstacles are to be removed and what training initiatives are to be reorganised, bearing in mind that he has welcomed the Queen's Speech so wholeheartedly?

Mr. Arnold: I am talking of obstacles which 30 or 40 years of Socialism have imposed. I sat in this place from 1974 to 1979, during which time a Labour Government introduced measure after measure, usually with euphemistic titles, such as the Employment Protection Act 1975, which, far from protecting employment, has increased the level of unemployment. We are right to move in the direction of removing the obstacles, several of which still stand in the way of the employment of young people. That is a specific issue that will be dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment when the relevant Bill is introduced.

Unemployment in the north-west is at its lowest level for seven years, yet neither the Leader of the Opposition nor the hon. Member for Preston referred to the recent fall in the unemployment figures. The many newspaper commentators who have been sturdily rejecting the Government's policies have failed to recognise the real progress that has been made in creating employment and reducing the unemployment figures. We are entitled to welcome that and to say that the trend will continue in the months ahead, provided that we do not alter the general direction in which our policies are taking us.

The Government are right to put first and foremost at the top of their economic programme the continuing battle against inflation. The fact that inflation is rising is a signal of how much still remains to be done. We shall never be able to solve the broad structural problems of the economy, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Moorlands referred, unless we recognise that only a private enterprise culture and economy is likely to produce growth, real increases in output and the opportunities for employment that can sustain our objectives.

The Socialist policies that were advocated by the Leader of the Opposition and by the hon. Member for Preston are recipes for turning the country back on what has been achieved during the past 10 years. I reject that approach. I welcome the Queen's Speech and I urge my right hon. and hon. Friend's to stand firm on the economic policies that the Government have put before the House and the country.

5.14 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): The Queen's Speech outlines the Government's legislative programme, but it does not take into account the overall effect that it may have on various sectors of the economy and the industry within them. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said, the privatisation of the electricity and water industries will be fought clause by clause, in accordance with parliamentary procedures. We must be realistic and recognise that, with the Government's majority, the electricity industry, for example, will be privatised. That being so, the House must concern itself with the spin-offs of the privatisation.

I shall outline briefly the problems of the mining industry and describe what has taken place since 1978. In 1978, in the Wakefield area, there were 20 pits with a work force of 16,900. By 1984, there were 16 pits and a work force of 15,061. In 1987, there were eight collieries and a work force of 6,096. In the first few months of 1988, three more collieries closed, with the loss of another 1,855 jobs. In May, the district's remaining five pits employed only 4,036 people. The average age of those employed was 34.

It is well recognised that the international market is leading us into great change. British Coal has always relied on its main customers, such as the Central Electricity Generating Board, and it is in great competition with cheap imported coal. Private Bills have been introduced to expand certain ports to enable more cheap coal to be imported. There is great fear that, following the privatisation of the electricity industry, the private companies will be attracted to cheap coal. That can be understood and accepted within the terms of a pure economic argument, but if it happens, the mining industry will have a work force of about 45,000 by the time that it is privatised. In 1978, the work force was more than 200,000.

Those figures illustrate the great impact that certain events have had on mining communities. With the privatisation of the electricity industry, the question is, "How many more?" It is thought that another 50,000 will lose their jobs. The young men involved, who will be aged 34 and less, will not receive the reasonably attractive redundancy payments that we saw in 1984 onwards. If the Government continue with their current policy of merely encouraging alternative employment, there will be further devastation.

In the mining communities—this is certainly true of the one that I represent in Castleford—there is little alternative employment. In my constituency, 11,000 jobs have been lost since 1984. I can count on the fingers of my two hands the jobs that have become available to replace those which have been lost. How long can this continue? We have appealed to the Government to recognise the problem and to zone areas for assisted area status. If the Government had been willing to implement such a policy, areas such as the one that I represent could have attracted grants from the Government and the EEC. Unfortunately, the Government have failed to respond.

The Queen's Speech tells us that the Government

> "will continue to promote enterprise and to foster the conditions necessary for the sustained growth of output and employment."

I hope that that means that the Government will support applications from the Wakefield metropolitan district council, which is in a declining industrial region, under the second objective of a new European regulation. I am aware that the Government have forwarded their proposals and that Wakefield has been included. I am aware also that the list that the Government have presented to the Commission is far too long, and that some of the applications will not be successful. I am concerned for the mining communities, which have been devastated and will continue to be devastated by the privatisation of electricity. As they have not been zoned by the Government as assisted areas, I fear that they will be taken off the list. I hope that the Government will take this on board, if the Gracious Speech means anything at all.

The Gracious Speech states:

> "My Government will vigorously pursue their policies for reducing crime."

Another passage states:

> "They will maintain firm control of public expenditure, so . . . allowing further improvements in priority services".

I hope that the Government are sincere about crime and the priority services.

Between 15 November and 18 November, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* carried major articles which were not unconnected with the problems in our mining communities where young school leavers are unable to find work. Those youngsters, who would normally have entered the mining industry, have been unable to get work. The articles state that 31 inmates in Her Majesty's prisons, the majority of whom were unconvicted and on remand, have killed themselves so far this year and it is expected that the figure will be much higher before the end of the year.

Armley prison in Leeds is between nine and 12 miles from my constituency. In the past five months, three youths aged under 18 have committed suicide in that prison. During the course of the year, 18 have attempted suicide. The *Yorkshire Evening Post* report on the suicides claims that they were driven to suicide by brutal and squalid conditions in one of Britain's most notorious gaols.

We must all be concerned about the fact that 16 and 17-year-old youths who have never been in prison before, the vast majority of whom are not guilty of any crime but merely waiting on remand, find conditions which cause them to commit suicide. The report continued:

> "There is evidence that many innocent men were desparate to escape beatings and appalling conditions. A top psychiatrist, Dr. Stephen Shaw, is reported as saying, 'A fate worse than death . . . that is what some teenagers on remand in prison believe is in store for them and that is why they commit suicide.'"

The Prison Officers Association has stated:

> "Suicides will continue until a shake-up of the whole legal process is put into operation by the Government."

The chairman of the Prison Officers Association at Armley prison, Mr. David Sayer, is reported to have said:

> "If it costs money, they will have to spend it."

The Prison Officers Association's view on the issue is clear: youngsters on remand should not be in prison. It is as simple and straightforward as that. The association claims:

> "We do not want them, because we do not have the staff or facilities to cope. We have said so loud and clear to anyone willing to listen, yet a fifth of our inmates are teenagers awaiting trial."

There are 1,200 prisoners in Armley prison, one fifth of whom are kids aged under 18 who are awaiting trial on remand. The conditions are such that there have been three suicides in five months and 18 attempted suicides so far this year.

If the Government are so concerned about crime, will they find employment for kids in the mining communities to keep idle hands out of mischief, instead of banging them up in squalid gaols 23 hours a day, in cells with hardened criminals? If the Government are serious about reducing crime, they must find employment and provide facilities to which to send youngsters on remand rather than send them to squalid prisons which cause youngsters to commit suicide.

Some of the youngsters to whom I have referred are my constituents; I have received letters from their heartbroken parents. If the message in the Gracious Speech about cutting crime means anything, the Government must act.

An experienced criminal solicitor in Leeds, Mr. Rodney Lester, has said:

> "Brutality is the order of the day in Armley prison. If young remand prisoners going into jail are not brutes when they go in, the chances are that they will have been brutalised when they come out."

Other organisations, and the chief probation officer for west Yorkshire, have expressed grave concern about this matter. The Government must seriously consider providing accommodation for remand prisoners, and above all, they must provide employment for youngsters which will stop them getting into prison in the first place.

The Gracious Speech also states that the Government are concerned about and committed to the National Health Service. If that is so, the Government had better get their act together and satisfy the nurses. At present, the nurses are very dissatisfied. Last Friday evening, I attended a mass meeting of nurses with my hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and for Hemsworth (Mr. Buckley). Before the Government talk about hotheads or militants, I must stress that the meeting consisted of senior nursing sisters, staff nurses and nurses right down the line. It is not sufficient to tell nurses that, if they do not accept the grade or work to the grade that is allocated, they will be taken through the courts.

It is a pity that the Secretary of State for Health was not at that meeting. We heard that senior nursing sisters in hospitals in Wakefield had found themselves £2,500 a year worse off than the people they supervised. We were told that two wards in a hospital in Wakefield one night that week had not been staffed on the night shift. That cannot go on. The Government tried to get over the message that they want to do the best thing for the nurses when they said a few weeks ago that the pay award would be paid in full. However, the Government did not tell us about the chaos that their policy would create. If the Government do not put things right, all that they say about caring for the Health Service means nothing.

The nurses want some consideration; they want looking after and fair remuneration. The Gracious Speech means that we will have a very long and hard Session. I assure Conservative Members that many of the details in the Gracious Speech will be fought clause by clause by Opposition Members.

5.28 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak so early in the debate on the Gracious Speech. From the Back Benches, I associate myself with the remarks by the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister in admiration of the speeches moving and seconding the Loyal Address by my hon. Friends the Members for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) and for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples). It is rare for the House to be treated to a pair of such accomplished and witty speeches on such an occasion. I compliment them, with just a tinge of envy for the fact that they could speak so well.

It is clear that the privatisation measures foreshadowed in the Gracious Speech will play a major part in the Session that lies ahead of us. They may even dominate it. The Government may have no problem convincing the House what they are about, but they may have harder work convincing the public of the rightness of their privatisation plans.

I say that because the public are surprisingly confused and cool in their outlook to the privatisation programme. In their privatisation policies the Government are not buoyed up by a tide of public enthusiasm. Despite the

[Mr. Alan Haselhurst]

obviously successful privatisation of British Airways, there is no great pressure from the public to move along the path of further privatisation.

When people's telephones go wrong, they are all too ready to say that it is because British Telecom has been privatised. That is utter nonsense, but it is said. The muddle goes even further. Recently, a lady wrote to me to complain that in her area letters had been going astray. She said that she expected a better service from the Post Office now that it had been privatised. If the public are not sure what has been privatised, the Government have a slightly uphill task in pressing the argument for further privatisation, particularly of electricity and water. That is especially so with water, because many are inclined to think that water is in a special and different category.

There are two simple reasons why the Government's privatisation policy should be supported. The first is to take the electricity and water industries out of Treasury control and to bring them nearer to their customers. The fact that they can make their own decisions about the level of investment that is required is crucial to the successful running of such industries. That is a fairly fundamental point. Secondly, there is a different ethos in the management and control of a private company. That is an indefinable thing, and while public service may be a good thing, it can result in a lack of the sharp edge of management that one would wish to see.

It is important that we should press ahead with the Government's privatisation plans. However, I am sure that the House, particularly Conservative Members, will look at the exact extent of the competitive ingredient that can be injected into the two privatisation projects.

It is not so long ago that the British Airports Authority was privatised. I am pleased to see that the BAA is progressing well. I hope that it will not be thought of as sour grapes on my part if I say that I feel surer now than I did at the time that the privatisation could have been handled differently. It has been evident from what has happened in the past two or three years that the separation of London's airports might have served the country's interests rather better than their being privatised altogether.

The sharp-eyed among us will have noticed that civil aviation does not appear in any form in the Gracious Speech. We are told that other measures will be laid before us. One measure that will creep in during the Session, perhaps late one night, is a statutory instrument in which the House will be asked to increase the air transport movements at Stansted. That is the device that the Government created to enable the expansion of Stansted airport from 8 million to 15 million passengers per annum, for which legal planning permission has been granted.

The coming year must surely see the start of some moves further to develop airports policy. There are already noises off. The chairman of BAA, Sir Norman Payne, has gone on record as saying that he wishes to see further expansion at Stansted and Heathrow. There have even been noises on, in that not very long ago my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport said that he did not believe that there could be further expansion at Gatwick. Things are being said on the subject of airports policy. All those statements, whether expansive or restrictive, are bound to cause alarm in the constituencies that are directly affected, and those are many more than just my own.

I want to make a plea to the Government to take a comprehensive look, in the course of the year, at our airport needs in the south-east, and in the rest of the country for that matter. The development of airports policy in Britain has been characterised by the little-by-little approach, which has not served our interests well. At one moment we are told, no doubt under the pressure of popular resistance in areas where airport capacity is talked of, that extra terminal capacity is required and documents are produced to try to prove that. The next moment we are told that it is runway capacity that is crucial, and evidence is produced to make that point.

There has been a great muddle in our airports policy over the years, and I hope that we shall not perpetuate it. It would be characteristic of the Government to want to take a long-term view. The continuing success of the Government's economic policies will lead to increased demand, part of which will be demand for air travel, whether for holidays or business. Clearly, therefore, some of the more optimistic predictions that are being made about airport capacity have as good a chance of being fulfilled as other less optimistic forecasts. If the Government recognise that that is likely to flow from the success of their economic policies, it is incumbent on them at the same time to bring before the House an airports policy that will take account of it.

It would be wrong to invite the House to approve further expansion at Stansted without saying what will come after that. It is not fair to my constituents to make it appear that any further expansion that must take place will have to take place at Stansted because there is nowhere else. If the picture, when it is unveiled, suggests that we shall need not only one more runway in the London area, but perhaps two in the next 25 or 30 years, we need to know that now, so that we can effectively plan where to put those runways. It is unacceptable to creep forward small step by small step. That is not helping us to preserve London's competitive position against Frankfurt, Paris and Amsterdam. Nor does it help us to achieve the full play of competition between airlines, which is also something that the Government support.

In the light of the liberalisation of air services in Europe, there will be still further pressure on the London airports system. We hope that liberalisation is achieved as part of the completion of the single market in Europe. I welcome all the measures that are being taken to complete the single market. I note the Government's commitment, reiterated in the Gracious Speech, and I warmly endorse it. Without surrendering an open outlook to the rest of the world, our destiny, as the Prime Minister reaffirmed at Bruges, truly lies in Europe. It may be paradoxical, but I suspect that the Government will find it easier to convince the British public about that than about the privatisation of the water industry. I hope that the Government will not make the country's ambitions in Europe harder to fulfil by running away with the idea that they have a sullen, suspicious public behind them.

I have been reading the last volume of Martin Gilbert's biography of Sir Winston Churchill. In the immediate post-war years, Sir Winston played a great part in stirring the public's imagination over steps towards the broader unification of Europe. One notes that in the difficult post-war years that was treated with much enthusiasm by the public, and that the Conservative party chided the then Labour Government for not being sufficiently enthusiastic about it. I cannot believe that 40 years further away from the second world war it is more difficult to convince the British public of the benefits of greater European unification.

If the Government worry about public opinion, they should take heed that, for our main industrial companies, the fuse has been lit and that, to coin a phrase, there is no going back. There may be disagreements about exactly what is needed to achieve the single market, but if we are prepared to take full advantage of the opportunities that it will present, we must bring home to businesses—large, medium and small—exactly what is involved for them. The Government cannot afford any ambiguity in the signals that they send about the importance of what will happen. We must negotiate soberly and practically on individual measures, but we should take a wider, rather than narrower, view of what the single market could mean for us.

I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) about frontiers. It is a mistake to think that this country can maintain its frontiers against our 11 partners if they decide to have no frontiers between themselves. One sure consequence will be that business invests, not in this country, but in continental Europe. We are proud that we have attracted to this country, because of our improving economy and attitudes to industry, more outside investment wanting to be part of the single European market. It will be folly to give the slightest hint that we are prepared to see ourselves playing less than a full part in that market than any other country.

I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Moorlands said about joining the European monetary system. It should go further than that, and we ought to consider the potential benefits of a single European currency. That may cause some fluttering in the dovecotes, but industry will increasingly find it convenient to deal with its counterparts if it operates a single currency. In Europe we impose burdens upon ourselves by having to observe currency differences, which create uncertainty in business deals. I believe that there will be increasing pressure from industry to move in the direction of a single European currency, and we should not set our hearts and minds against it.

If we are to preserve competition—which is something in which we, as the Conservative party, believe—for the benefit of British consumers, we must reconcile it with the need to have larger companies to compete effectively within Europe and throughout the world. If that means that amalgamations and mergers in this country should be accepted, the only way left to regulate monopoly will be on the larger dimension of the European Community.

The logical underpinning for the changed economy that the Government seek, and for the longer-term industrial success that we all crave, is the fullest possible coming into being of the single market. The fruition of much of the Government's programme is dependent upon that, so the single market becomes the most important part of the Gracious Speech—which I have the greatest pleasure in supporting.

5.54 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I take this opportunity to draw attention again to what I believe is one of the greatest social injustices that Northern Ireland has to endure—the fact that no arrangement has been made to recognise that, in terms of basic commodities, the people of the North of Ireland are 30 per cent. poorer because of the cost differential that applies there as compared with any other part of England, Scotland or Wales. It is incredible that no allowance has been made for that in social security benefits. I do not see how anyone in this country can be happy with a situation in which people who are on the borderline of poverty, and who must resort to social security, are by definition 30 per cent. worse off in Northern Ireland than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. That is a crass injustice and one that ought to be put right at the earliest opportunity.

It is a matter of regret that, for the third week running, I have to speak about a substantial derogation of the rights of Northern Ireland people. What we have heard today in relation to more punitive measures will not bring a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland and to the violence there but will exacerbate them, and will further delay the day we can all begin to work towards peace.

Last week, there was a derogation of rights in respect of the right to silence. The week before, it was in respect of free speech and the freedom of press reporting. This week, it is in respect of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984, and removal of the 50 per cent. remission that has existed since that legislation was applied in Northern Ireland.

Next week and the week after, there will be a further derogation in respect of a free and open franchise, which should exist in every country. The question that people ought to ask themselves is: what derogation of rights will there be the week after next, or six months hence?

The measures I have mentioned have not been as successful as the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland predicted. What will happen further down the line? When will Parliament say to itself, "So far and no further."? When Parliament reaches that point, it will have arrived at the moment of realisation—I hope it will be soon—that the course upon which the Government have embarked is not, and cannot be, successful. The reason is that the Government have chosen to make the law and the process of justice a weapon with which to defeat terrorism. However, the law is not there for that reason. I repeat what I said last week and the week before: the law is there to administer justice and it cannot be used to defeat terrorism in the way that the Government are attempting, without bending it and reducing its integrity and basic principles, which we should all cherish.

One element of the Government's action that I welcome is the legislation dealing with racketeering. It is wrong that individuals and organisations in Northern Ireland should be allowed to extort money from private individuals, private businesses and public bodies in the way that they do. However, I exhort caution. The legislation to which I refer will give the Secretary of State a power normally reserved for a judge or a court, and we must be careful to ensure that the onus of proof will reside with the state and not with the suspect. While I welcome that element of the Government's proposals, it could also be dangerous.

I am concerned about the withdrawal of remission, because it runs the danger of putting the whole debate

[Mr. Seamus Mallon]

back at the emotional epicentre of Irish republicanism, which is the prisons. We have seen throughout history how the emotional content of what happens in Irish prisons can itself change history, and cause problems that last not for one or five years but for generations.

What is the Government's objective in making the proposed changes and those of the past three weeks? Is it to create a punitive arrangement, or to bring about the rehabilitative approach that I believe should underlie all legislation relating to the courts and prisons? In the last analysis, someone must put it all together again and enable a small number of people—one and a half million—to live together in peace on a small bit of land. If we derogate from normal practice as I believe the Government are now doing, we are in danger of accepting abnormality. The Government may have conditioned themselves to live with abnormality, but those of us who live in the North of Ireland cannot allow that to become our standard. We are entitled to work towards normality, rather than settling for the lowest common denominator as the Government are doing.

As for the removal of the 50 per cent. remission, why was it there in the first place? The reasons, I think, are obvious: they are on record and they have been given by the Government here. First, a number of young people are caught up in the process of violence. That has not changed to this day, and as a reason it is as valid now as it ever was. Secondly, we are working against a background of legislation that does not operate in England, Scotland or Wales—the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987, the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 and the public order legislation.

It is not accurate to say—as do the Minister of State, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister—that arrangements are being brought into step with those in England, Scotland and Wales, or that they are being brought into step with those in the Republic of Ireland.There is a fundamental difference. In all those places, parole is available after one third of a sentence has been served, a facility that does not exist in the North of Ireland. We are not only playing with fire within the prisons and creating a highly emotional issue that will benefit not the Government or those who want peace, but those who want to manipulate it; we are also adding to the harshness of an already harsh prison regime.

The second question is implied in the first. A number of people, on leaving prison, revert to terrorism and to the support of terrorism. But the Government have not given the figure, and I think that they must put it on record. They tell us that they estimate such offences to be in the region of 25 per cent. of scheduled offences—that is, terrorist offences—but that is only a guess. When it is compared with the available figure of 60 per cent. for those convicted of non-terrorist offences, the notion that there is a high level of return to violence must be challenged.

I wonder whether the Prime Minister will accede to the point made by Viscount Colville in his report on the Prevention of Terrorism Act. He said that the iniquitous system of exclusion orders against people from Northern Ireland should be done away with, but the Prime Minister made no reference to that today. I wonder whether it will happen, or whether the Government will override the view of a respected Member of the other House who is also a respected and learned member of the legal profession.

Does not the very fact that the arrangement is being made permanent tell us something about the imaginative approach of the Government? Does it not tell us something about their state of mind? It is very dangerous to start marginalising a large section of the community —such as we have in the North of Ireland—who are not on the margins but central and indigenous, and who support those who support violence. It cannot and will not work. The Government should be drawing those people into the process of creating peace and stability, rather than pushing them out.

There is no better example than the way in which the Government are now tampering with the electoral process by deciding that everyone who stands for election in the North of Ireland must make a declaration against violence. I shall have no problem with that, and I should like to think that no Member from the North of Ireland will either, but there will be problems none the less. I am not talking about those who form armies and occasionally take them to the top of hillsides to wave gun licences and threaten the Government; I am talking about those who every day give unambiguous support to the men of violence. They have said that they will make the declaration. What happens then? Will the Government, in their wisdom and strength of purpose, step in and take them before the courts? No: that will be left to a private individual.

I do not believe that this will work, but if it is to do so at all successfully, an individual will have to take people before the High Court, at enormous expense and risk, to prove the spurious point that the Government are trying to make. That does not strike me as firm government or dealing with the problem that I accept is there—the problem of people on the one hand purporting to be democrats and on the other hand supporting violence. It is also a problem for me to realise that Members of the House create armies such as the Ulster Resistance Organisation, whose huge arms cache was found close to where I live last week. But we should face up to such problems honestly, not in this inadequate, devious way.

The legislation will not succeed, for the same reasons that the other legislation I have mentioned will not. People will drive a horse and cart through it, and those of us who are still involved in local government will be dancing in and out of the courts for the next four years. Think of the damage that will be done to the whole political process in the North of Ireland, which is damaged enough already, and the publicity that will be given to those who go through the courts or who take others through the courts. I know from rumour—a potent factor in the North of Ireland—that a long list of people are already earmarked for visits to the courts who do not belong to the UDA, to Sinn Fein or to a number of the organisations at which the legislation is aimed.

I am disappointed by these changes. I confidently predict that somewhere along the line a member of the Government must have the courage to stand up and say, "We are not going any further towards bending the law and derogating from the highest standards." Otherwise, the integrity of the law will go, and someone—and it will not be a Conservative Member—will have to put Humpty Dumpty together again.

That is painstaking work, which other people will have to do. They will have to create confidence and support for the process of law and justice, which is being eroded through Government edict. Surely, after the bloodstained history of Ireland and in view of Ireland's relationship with this country, the Government should have learned something.

The executions of 1916 were said to have passed Irish republicanism into the hands of people whose motivation was not only love of Ireland, but hatred of Britain. Must we continue to make the same mistakes decade after decade? In the case of this Government, perhaps I should say, week after week.

6.1 pm

Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): I came to the House as Member of Parliament for my present constituency 20 years ago this month, but for 16 months between the end of 1964 and 1966 I had the honour to represent Lewisham, West. It gives me great pleasure to place on record my personal congratulations to my hon. Friend the present Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) on the charming way in which he seconded the motion that a Loyal Address be sent to Her Majesty. I hope that he will represent Lewisham, West for as long as I have represented New Forest.

I find nothing in the Queen's Speech with which I can possibly disagree. Quite clearly, it represents the redeeming of the pledges that were given to the people of this country in the general election campaign. Nevertheless, the Queen's Speech raises matters that require further consideration.

First, I want to deal with the comments that were made in the Queen's Speech about defence and the need for effective and strong defences. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was kind enough to respond to me in an intervention earlier this afternoon, when I asked whether she could yet tell us when a decision would be made about the replacement of 500 Chieftain tanks by either the American-designed Abrahams mark 1A1 or by the Challenger 2. As we know, there was a third possibility for the contract—the West German Leopard. In all probability, that third possibility has been ruled out.

I want to place on record my concern about the way in which the choice will be made. No one wants a repeat performance of the difficulties in which the Government found themselves over the airborne early warning system, when vast sums of taxpayers' money were spent on a system that was clearly unable to do the job. For that reason, I found no difficulty in supporting the decision to buy the American system. However, on this occasion it appears that the choice available to the Ministry of Defence is finely balanced and the effect of losing the order would be so disastrous that the matter should be examined in the greatest detail.

The two tanks are very similar. The American Abrahams tank is powered by a gas turbine engine, whereas the British tank will be powered by a Perkins 1,200 horsepower engine. On paper, that is 300 horsepower less than the American tank. However, it should be remembered that a gas turbine engine is far more thirsty on fuel, which will create additional problems of logistic support for tank formations, and I am advised that Perkins states that its engine is mildly turbocharged, and could be uprated to 1,500 horsepower, if necessary. Therefore, there is no difference in terms of performance and speed. In addition, even when a gas turbine engine is running at tick-over speed it has a more definite heat signature than a diesel engine, so in terms of battlefield logic it makes a great deal of sense to stick with the British design.

We are told that one of the drawbacks of the current Chieftain tank and, we are told by those who have examined the plans, of the Challenger 2 is that the gunnery system is less efficient. I hope that Vickers, and those companies that subcontract from Vickers, will ensure that that will not be the stumbling block for the British design. Vickers has already spent about £40 million on the project and about 12,000 jobs at Leeds and Newcastle upon Tyne could be affected by a decision to buy the American tank. In addition, British companies would lose servicing contracts and contracts for sales elsewhere in the world, so I hope that we shall choose the British product.

Page three of the Gracious Speech refers to the economy and to the need to

> "pursue firm financial policies designed to bear down on inflation."

Hon. Members have made their own suggestions this afternoon on how that could be achieved. Inevitably, some rather simplistic views have been expressed, and there seems to be a feeling that there is a panacea to cure all difficulties.

Some hon. Members have said that we need to join the European monetary system—a view that I totally reject. The European monetary system, and especially the exchange rate mechanism, was designed to cater for like currencies. Within that system, currencies operate within predetermined arithmetic bands and, if a currency goes outside its band, remedial action is necessary. On certain occasions, that has meant not only increases in interest rates, about which hon. Members have complained today, but jumps of up to 20 per cent. in interest rates to bring a currency within its band.

Our currency has a characteristic unlike all other European currencies, in that, for whatever reason, it is a petro-currency and is perceived as such. Given the wide fluctuations in the cost of crude oil, our currency could be given a band, without any reference to the performance of the economy, and we could find extreme difficulty in trying to stay within that particular range. That would be an added strain on the British economy, which we could well do without.

Other hon. Members have talked of the need to reduce the value of sterling, as if that was an easy option for restoring competitiveness to the economy and removing any deficit that may exist. I remind the House that in 1976, in the darkest days of the Labour economic crisis, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had to take immediate action, part of which relied on a visit to the International Monetary Fund. The West German deutschmark and the Japanese yen were at record high levels, yet their cars and products were pouring unchecked into this country. The low value of our currency did not help us at all. In fact, the reverse was true. Currency is an indicator of the international financial respect that a country enjoys.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why the percentage of imported vehicles has steadily increased since those years and continues to increase?

Mr. McNair-Wilson: Clearly, personal preference has something to do with it. Inevitably, if a product that we

[Mr. McNair-Wilson]

produce is not to the liking of the consumer, the consumer will buy elsewhere. I have always tried to buy British, and I am satisfied with the products. The hon. Gentleman knows much about such matters, but I remind him that unfortunately the creation of an economy such as I have just described by the Labour party in the dying years of its last Administration did nothing to stimulate competition. It was for that reason that British Leyland and many other businesses produced products of the wrong quality, which meant that people bought from elsewhere. As a result, it was not just the motor industry that suffered. The steel industry was also affected because every foreign car that was imported meant a tonne of steel that did not come from a British steel mill. There are no short cuts. We want a properly competitive industry to produce products at the right price, at the right time and, more importantly, of the right quality.

When discussions on the world economy takes place today, there is one component that is totally different from any of the pre-war or immediately post-war years. At the time of the great crash of 1929—that happens to be the year when I was born, which some might regard as significant—the world's national currencies were related to the amount of precious metal in the possession of the national Governments. We all recall that the gold standard created terrible misery. Throughout those pre-war and early post-war years, currency crises meant that gold and dollar reserves were the arbiter and deciding factor in how far an economy could be expanded.

Now that gold has been demonetised and we have moved away from a reliance on a relationship with a given amount of precious metal, there is no limit to the size of the world economy. Previous constraints no longer exist. Although hon. Members may be concerned about the level of the American deficit or about our own deficit, we should look at the wider issues. If we were to accept the proposals that were put forward by the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Democrats, that we should have an immediate restriction on credit, we would begin once again to recreate recession and depression in this country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Arnold) said earlier, if the Americans were substantially to increase their level of taxation to deal with the deficit, they would do precisely the same thing to their economy. Therefore, I do not regard those as sensible options.

Interest rates are an option that could be used, in spite of the important and engaging remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) about the need to reduce them. Interest rates are probably the quickest way to bring any imbalance under control.

The third of my four points about the Gracious Speech is the Government's continuing attachment to the importance of protecting our environment. I live in an environmentally sensitive part of England. I have the honour to represent the New Forest. It is not just a very nice part of England; it is a unique part of England—indeed, a unique part of Europe. It is the largest piece of lowland vegetation in the whole of central Europe.

Recently in the New Forest we have had some difficulties because of the local authority's attempt to introduce a private Bill to circumvent some of the general Acts of Parliament which are in place to protect that unique part of England. The legislation that is designed to give that protection stems largely from an inquiry which was set up in 1946 by a Labour Government to look at the requirements of the New Forest in the immediate post-war period and the years beyond. The New Forest now needs a new inquiry. Although we have had a full review, which was set up by the Forestry Commission, the final report which will be available shortly, only an independent inquiry can ultimately produce the balanced report that will be necessary if new legislation is to be introduced at some future date.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will find it possible to set up an inquiry, like that was established in 1946, not only to consider the requirements of the New Forest and of the people who live there, but to ensure that a balance between the increasing urbanisation of the south of England and the protection of this remarkable ecological example of rural England can be preserved. Therefore, I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will ensure that my right hon. Friend is told of that requirement, because it will not be enough to rely on legislation stemming from an inquiry that took place over 40 years ago. We need something new, and we need it soon.

Finally, I should like to turn to the restructuring and sale of our electricity supply industry. A long-standing problem for those concerned with energy is the complete imbalance between the generating part of our electricity industry and the part that is supposed to be concerned with prices. We have always known of the dominant position that the Central Electricity Generating Board has enjoyed relative to that enjoyed by the Electricity Council, even to the point that the CEGB not only made but spent all the money. With great respect to those who have served the Electricity Council for so long, it has been little more than a tassel on a lion's tail.

The idea of restructuring the industry is not new to any political party. Attempts have been made by both sides of the House to look for ways of redressing and restoring the balance. Therefore, I am happy that we should go the full distance in our restructuring and return the industry to private ownership. However, I have one caveat, because, although in separating generation from transmission one has immediately and helpfully—and hopefully—broken the idea of a public monopoly by becoming a private monopoly, one could be in serious danger if there were a shortage of supply, because the generating companies might well group together to produce a common and increasing price scale. If we are to see the fruits of the success of our policy, it is essential that the Government quickly expand the number of generating companies and units that will be available after vesting day.

At the moment, the two generating organisations will control 70 per cent. and 30 per cent. respectively. The area boards are there to take up any options and opportunities which may exist. However, I shall not feel happy about the privatisation of electricity until I see a much larger number of generators on the scene. I refer not necessarily to those who build the large power stations, to which we have become accustomed, but to well-backed generators which use gas turbines and smaller thermal stations to add to generating capacity, so that transmission companies may have a genuine, wide range of options, and, as a result, we shall see prices fall. The alternative is a cartel of generating capacity, which would lead to increasing prices and would completely defeat the objective of the Government's policy.

I have picked out four significant matters in the Gracious Speech. The speech sets out a formidable programme for the next 12 months, but, having heard my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister explain the Government's plans to the House this afternoon, I am convinced that we shall have little difficulty in convincing the country of their value.

6.20 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): In the past few weeks in Glasgow and in Scotland generally there has been much talk about nationalism. It is disappointing that the Scottish Nationalist Members who told us that they would set the heather on fire are not present. I am disappointed also that the Queen's Speech does not mention devolution for Scotland. It is clear that the vast majority of people in Scotland do not want to go down the road of separatism, but they want a say in the running of their own affairs. The Government should remember that.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) spoke about the North of Ireland, as he called it. Perhaps that is an appropriate term. However, he spoke about Northern Ireland. In view of recent events, there is worry in Scotland that we could see a hatred of the English emerging again. I am Scottish born and bred. I am proud of my culture and my heritage. I hope to God that I never see the day when my country is run by people who hate others on the basis of race and creed.

In recent weeks in the Govan area, I have seen something emerge that the press has not covered. I mean no disrespect to Scottish Nationalist Members, but some of their followers are frightening people. They are prepared to crowd around Members of other parties at polling stations to make sure that they do not hand out leaflets. Because of their political beliefs, they are prepared to abuse those who are interested in promoting their parties and democratic systems.

Ten years ago, when I was a councillor, and when the SNP had some seats in Glasgow, councillors were prepared to say that, unless they related to their wards, they were not prepared to push through any decisions. We must consider not only the nationalism that the press has been reporting but the ultra-nationalism that can be seen in Scotland. Believe me, it is frightening. We have already seen people who, only five or six years ago, were anti-European. They went around factories telling people not to get into Europe. They now say that Europe is the greatest thing since sliced bread.

In Scotland, as in the rest of the country, there is great worry about the regrading of nurses, nursing sisters and auxiliaries. We should not forget that regrading affects auxiliaries. The rights of women have been mentioned. It is interesting to note that many auxiliary nurses are women who have brought up their families and who have lost education opportunities. They take up auxiliary nursing so that they can have an interesting job that can give themselves a decent career and a proper status. The Government have failed miserably in looking after such dedicated people. The word "dedication" has been used time and again, but it is hypocritical for Ministers to talk about the dedication of nurses. Within five minutes of some nurses expressing a grievance, the Government are the first to say that they are harming patients and the National Health Service.

One of the biggest employers in my constituency is Stobhill hospital. I visited that hospital three times to attend meetings there in the past week. I can lay to rest the case that trade unions are stirring up matters. Pressure has come from nursing sisters and those in other grades. They called the meetings and asked elected trade union representatives to come along. If Ministers think that that is just another case of trade union officers and militant trade unionists stirring up matters and leading workers by the nose, I invite them to come to Stobhill hospital or to any hospital in Glasgow. They will then see the bitter resentment that has been caused there because the Government and the health boards have made an absolute mess of regrading. Glasgow is even worse off than areas outside the boundaries. Health boards in areas other than Glasgow have given the benefit of the doubt to nursing sisters and auxiliaries.

We have a colder climate north of the border. It is exceptionally cold just now in Glasgow and in the north of Scotland——

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): And in Greenock.

Mr. Martin: As my hon. Friend said, it is exceptionally cold in Greenock.

We had about four inches of snow at the weekend. That is a serious problem for the elderly. We are talking about the privatisation of the generating boards, but, as a small first step, we should abolish standing charges. Elderly people living alone are worried about bills and they try to cut the amount of gas and electricity that they use. Therefore, it stands to reason that the standing charge is proportionately bigger than any other charge. It is shameful that, sometimes, people spend only £5 or £6 on gas and electricity during the summer, but they are hit with a standing charge that is almost that amount again. We should do away with standing charges, at least, and examine the poverty of the elderly. All hon. Members must be ashamed when people go to their surgeries.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Has the hon. Gentleman investigated whether old people would in fact benefit from the abolition of standing charges? If standing charges are abolished, it means that the bills will go up for everyone else. The cost must be spread equally. Has it occurred to the hon. Gentleman that many old people are housebound and therefore have larger bills than people who go out to work?

Mr. Martin: I was coming on to the question of larger bills. Many elderly people have been accustomed to saving and putting aside the money for their rent, electricity and other bills. They gain some benefit in the summer, during the hot weather, but that benefit is taken away when the bill is lower, because they are hit with a standing charge. That is highlighted when a person's appliances are almost all gas and the only electricity used is for lighting. In those circumstances, it is very galling for an elderly person to have a small electricity charge, but to discover the same amount again for a standing charge.

I am ashamed, as no doubt other hon. Members are, of the fact that many pensioners tell us that they are in arrears with their electricity payments, and that to try to pay off

[Mr. Martin]

those arrears they have to reduce their electricity consumption by cutting down on their heating. The Government tell elderly people to guard against hypothermia, but because those people are in arrears with their electricity payments their only option is to cut back on heating. It is no use Ministers saying in communities such as mine that they will crack down on illegal moneylenders, when they are forcing people to take that road because of gas and electricity arrears.

I am worried that no mention has been made of drug and drink abuse. There is a flaw in the law of Scotland, and perhaps applies in England, too. In Scotland there has been a lot of publicity about the fact that no one under the age of 18 can be sold alcohol. However, it is not against the law for a person under the age of 18 to consume alcohol on the streets. If we are worried about law and order, it is ludicrous that people as young as 14 and 15 can consume beer and whisky on the streets. The Government should take steps to deal with that loophole in the law.

The Government have mentioned a recent campaign about drugs and the fear of AIDS. Frankly, that is not enough, when housewives cleaning their tenement closes and stairways run the risk of being jabbed by discarded hypodermic needles, which is how serious the problem is in some parts of Glasgow. Recently, after a church service, I was told that an 11-year-old child had picked up a discarded needle. She was not a drug user, nor was her family. That innocent child was cut and had to be rushed to hospital, and her parents had a worrying time wondering whether their child would contract hepatitis or AIDS. The Government are spending ha'pennies on the campaign to combat the drug and AIDS problem.

I cannot recall a time since becoming a Member of Parliament when a new nursery has been opened in my constituency. When talking about women's rights, and, most important, children's rights and better education for children, it is a scandal that our record for nursery education is worse than that of any in the European Community. The local authority in Strathclyde—a responsible local authority—cannot guarantee children at least a year's nursery education before they start primary school, which is probably the case for every local authority. That is shameful and something should be done about it.

6.34 pm

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): I always enjoy debates on the Gracious Speech. They are a kind of grand inquest on the nation, when we hear many speeches covering a wide variety of topics. Before thinking what I would say today, I refreshed my memory by looking up what I had said two years ago on a similar occasion. I see that then I praised

"the strength, energy and commitment of the Government,"—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1986; Vol. 105, c. 42.]

I reiterate that praise today, but add to that the strength, energy and commitment of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who goes from strength to strength in leading this country at home and abroad. We are greatly respected abroad and, in spite of the sad tales we have heard today, in the main our people have never been as prosperous as they are now.

Our Prime Minister has just returned from a most successful visit to the United States and she occupies a unique position on the world stage, however galling that may be to some Opposition Members.

There has been some mention in the press about the possibility of the Queen visiting the Soviet Union. The Soviets brutally murdered the Tsar and his family who, of course, were close relatives of the King of England. They have an appalling record of crimes against humanity.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir John Stokes: I have only just started.

Mr. Cook: All the more reason to.

Sir John Stokes: We need to see great and fundamental changes by the Soviet Union, such as dismantling the Berlin wall, before such a visit could be considered.

I welcome the statement in the Gracious Speech that we shall maintain strong defences. Agreeable as the reductions in nuclear arms have been, there is still no sign whatever of any reductions in Soviet conventional forces. Until those come about, we must continue to keep up our guard.

In foreign affairs, I support the Prime Minister's determination to keep our national identity and not to be swamped by what I can only call an absurd federalism among some EEC nations. Therefore, we must not be entirely bemused by the prospect of one market in 1992. Of course, so far some of the changes have been appalling, silly and unnecessary, such as tinkering with our ancient weights and measures. I now hear that our superb English silver, which is the best in the world, will no longer have its own distinguishing hallmark, but will have instead a miserable number produced by some faceless bureaucrat in Brussels.

I welcome the list of new Bills, long though it is. I hope that perhaps next year, as well as passing Bills, we can return to scrutinising Government expenditure and wherever possible saving the taxpayer's money, which is our prime duty.

The increase in the rate of inflation is worrying, as, too, are some aspects of the housing market. I have great confidence that, by next spring, the Chancellor will have substantially reduced the rise in inflation and that there will have been stabilisation—I hope, a fall—in house prices.

Enormous sums are still being spent on social security. We all pride ourselves on looking after the ill, the old and the unemployed, but I am not in favour of indiscriminate benefits, which are often paid for by imposing too high a tax on those with small incomes.

I welcome the further steps towards privatisation and towards increasing the efficiency of industry and commerce. The improvements in the west midlands are most encouraging. The fall in unemployment, the rise in orders, the creation of so many new businesses and the general commercial activity are welcome. In the hard times, the people of my constituency never complained; I rejoice in that, and congratulate them on their success now. They have also greatly improved their marketing and selling skills in an area that was once far too production-oriented. I also salute their tremendous export efforts, which are an absolute romance. If one goes into the packaging departments of firms medium and small, one sees the names of countries from all over the world. It makes one very proud.

The Government believe in encouraging individual effort and getting the state off our backs. The reductions in taxation are most welcome. So too is the enormous increase in private giving to charity, which I am sure is the result of people paying lower taxes. Almost the worst way in which to help people is by giving liberal helpings of taxpayers' money. Self-help, soon to be supported by local and central Government, will be the key to our success in regenerating the inner cities and other depressed parts of the economy.

Unfortunately, the Government have not yet had much success in dealing with crime, violence, punishment and the lack of it. Violent crime and armed robberies continue unabated. The vast majority of the public desire the return of the death penalty. Each time this Chamber refuses to conform to their wishes, our reputation suffers further harm. However, I welcome the steps that have been taken to combat football violence and hooliganism.

I detect a new social problem arising from affluence, not poverty. I refer to the appalling bad manners, increasing dirt, litter and vandalism that is evident in public places. Some areas also suffer from dreadfully bad, selfish and dangerous driving.

In the 18th century, the poor, who had to endure many hardships, were promised the reward of heaven in the next world by John Wesley and other preachers. Today, for some poor people who have become rich, heaven has arrrived. It is here and now, and those people respect neither God nor man. This is primarily a matter of moral training and discipline in the home, supported, I hope, by teachers and the clergy. We shall become a perfectly horrible nation unless steps are taken now to curb this menacing trend. I realise that the mass of the people live good lives and use their wealth responsibly. That only makes it more important to try to curb the bad behaviour of a small minority.

I welcome the intention to make the prevention of terrorism more permanent and positive. I am not one of those who are mad to replace section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911. That is mainly a matter of concern to journalists and media people and not to the ordinary man and woman in the street. Most ordinary, decent, patriotic Englishmen want state secrets to be kept and those who break them to be properly punished. Similarly, I am horrified that politicians should somehow have detailed control of our Secret Service. I can imagine nothing more disastrous for the safety of our country.

I welcome the improvements in the standard of education, but I am only sorry that, today, so little English history is taught. I take people around this place, which I greatly enjoy, and I show them the great portraits in the Royal Gallery and the paintings depicting the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo. Many children have never heard of Nelson and Wellington, our heroes. Surely the basis of our civilisation is our great and glorious history.

Today, Opposition Members have told us of some of the sad cases in life, but let me repeat what I have said so often in this place—how fortunate we are to live in this island. Our general elections, for instance, do not cause the convulsions that occur in some other countries. Our people are basically peaceful, particularly the English people. They hate revolution and civil strife.

Today, as I saw the Queen arriving, followed by the royal procession with the sun sparkling on the plumes and helmets and surrounded by the good-natured crowd, I thought, "My goodness, we have a lot to be thankful for; how cheerful are our people." They are rightly cheerful.

6.46 pm

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak at an early stage in this debate and I am also pleased to follow on closely from the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), who eloquently described the situation in Scotland. My speech, as a Labour Member representing the north-east of England, will follow a similar course, but whether my Englishness will be acceptable enough to the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) is somewhat doubtful.

I listened carefully to the Gracious Speech and to the fuller version given by the Prime Minister this afternoon. Along with, I suspect, many others, I am as perturbed by the glaring omissions in the Gracious Speech as I am by the catalogue of unwelcome Bills that it contains.

I want to concentrate on the failure of the Gracious Speech to tackle one of the most acute problems in Britain —the way in which power is centralised in our society and how decisions are increasingly concentrated not in Westminster or Whitehall, but in No. 10. Downing street.

I was amazed that, in response to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister denied that centralisation was taking place. It became clear, however, that she backed up her claim by quoting her privatisation programme. That is a peculiar form of economic decentralisation, which involves selling off something that is of benefit to us all for the benefit of a favoured few.

However, there is nothing in the Gracious Speech about political decentralisation or the reform of our political institutions. That is a tragedy. At one time, Britain was a shining beacon of democracy that others admired, but we are now falling behind many other countries in the quality and depth of our democracy.

What we need is political decentralisation, but what we will get is more centralisation and the denial of local and regional powers, which has been the hallmark of the Government since they took office. It is clear in the Gracious Speech that, once again, the Government are proposing a Bill to deal with the conduct of local authorities. That follows the curbing of local authority spending powers, rate capping, the poll tax and the abolition of the metropolitan counties.

We have seen the destruction of regional policy, the collapse of much regional financial support and the refusal to create regional institutions. The Government, who have presided over and helped to create the most marked regional and social divisions that many of us can remember, do not recognise that fact, and propose no remedies or initiatives. There seems to be a complete lack of awareness of regional feeling, yet I believe that the Government ignore it at their peril.

I was greatly amused to see a cartoon in one of the national newspapers last week, which referred to the Mappa Mundi that the Hereford cathedral authorities proposed to sell. The cartoon showed a 20th-century Mappa Mundi, with the Prime Minister gazing at it in appreciation. That distorted view of the world showed a

[Ms. Joyce Quin]

fairly small Europe on the left-hand side, a slightly larger United States of America on the right-hand side and in the middle a huge wodge entitled "South-East of England". The Prime Minister's Mappa Mundi is perhaps even more distorted than that, because many people in the south-east and in the inner-city area of London also seem to be ignored by the Government.

The Government's disregard of regional issues is particularly obvious in England and is particularly resented in my area, the north-east of England. Where I live in the north-east, there is a highly developed regional sense of identity, reinforced by strong tradition, particularly cultural and musical traditions. As we are so close to Scotland, perhaps our identity is neither particularly English nor particularly Scottish, but has something of each. That identity is not allowed any political expression by the Government.

I was pleased when, during the previous Session, my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) presented the Northern Regional Assembly Bill to the House. I was also pleased that it was followed later by the presentation, again by an Opposition Member, of the North West Regional Assembly Bill. That shows strongly that Labour is the party of decentralisation wherever it is felt to be needed throughout the United Kingdom.

In the northern region, a development body has been set up, but independently, without the full extent of Government support or blessing that would be necessary for that organisation to do an effective job. At present, it has to run on a shoestring budget. Labour Members from the northern region will try to remedy that in the coming Session of Parliament.

The need to cope with regional awareness is so low on the Government's list of priorities that it is difficult to find out how much the different Government Departments spend in the different regions. As a member of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, I have been trying to get the Government to produce spending statistics for their Departments by region, but so far without success.

The attitude of other European Governments shows that the Government are out of step in their view of the regions. At one time, France, with its Napoleonic structures, was thought to be the most centralised of Western democracies. These days, significant powers are given to the French regions. Germany's federal structure also works well and seems to be acceptable to all the states in the federation.

European feelings in favour of a strong regional structure were reflected in the European Parliament last week, when a report on the situation in the regions was adopted, which referred to the necessity for regional organisations to be elected and to have financial autonomy and sufficient resources to exercise their power. The hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) talked about the European Parliament and the need for greater recognition of its role. However, I am not sure that he would have supported that report, because his Conservative colleagues in the European Parliament did not, as they thought that it went in the opposite direction from that followed by the Conservative Government.

I believe strongly that we are seeing an arrogant misuse of power and that the Government—who, after all, were elected with only 42 per cent. of the popular vote—should not ignore the regional variations within that overall vote. In Scotland, Wales and the north of England they obtained less than one third of the votes cast.

Let me give a more recent example of a by-election, not the one that received so much publicity, but a by-election in the north-east—at Cramlington in Northumberland. There was an interesting vote. Labour was returned with 603 votes. The Democrats and the Social Democratic party got 361 and 239 respectively, the Greens got 89 and the Conservatives got 88. So much for the environmental reputation of the Government.

As a result of the general election, the Government have a mandate, but they do not have a mandate for riding roughshod over, or ignoring, regional or local democratic structures in the United Kingdom. I hope that the Government will learn some humility in the face of the majority who do not support them, and whose opposition grows daily more hostile.

6.56 pm

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) said, I always enjoy these debates because they give us an opportunity to look forward into the coming year and at the effects that the Government's proposals may have on us.

The Government's programme is a continuation of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's policy of moving our nation from the bottom of the league to being a great nation with an international reputation and commanding the respect of all other nations. That is an amazing feat. I am convinced that we shall continue that process in the new Session under her leadership.

I welcome the fact that early on the Gracious Speech mentions the most important issue—defence. I welcome the Government's plans for national security and the preservation of peace with the assistance and co-operation of our NATO allies and United States friends. The fourth paragraph of the Gracious Speech states that the Government

> "strongly support the United States' proposals for 50 per cent. reductions in American and Soviet strategic nuclear weapons."

We welcome that. We all look forward to disarmament, but we must be careful about two things—timing and verification. I welcome the Americans' initiative in starting the negotiations, and I am sure that we shall back them up.

Mr. Gorbachev's visit to this country illustrates two things. The first is the position of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in Europe and the world and her importance. Secondly, it shows the stature of our nation. My right hon. Friend said today that she would bring to Mr. Gorbachev's attention certain differences that are absolutely paramount. They are on the human rights issue, which must be discussed. We must say to Mr. Gorbachev that until he carries out reforms—for example, on Afghanistan—it is difficult to understand his philosophy.

We must also say that while he is embarking on an increase in arms production, we find it difficult to understand his philosophy. It would not be amiss to remind him of his own troubles in the Baltic states and other parts of the non-Russian republic, which are beginning to show him the internal desire for freedom in his own empire. Such suggestions can and will change his mind. I am sure that slowly he will be able to overcome the system of government in the Soviet Union and begin to concentrate on agriculture rather than armaments and bring his country back to what it was before the great war —the granary of Europe. I am sure that those are things that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be discussing with him.

The Queen's Speech refers to the Falklands. I would be happy to see negotiations with Argentina, as such negotiations would have advantages. However, I am determined to abide by our declaration that no change in the sovereignty of those islands will take place without the consent of the people who live there. That does not prevent us from negotiating with Argentina. Those are two separate issues and should be treated as such. Until the Government of Argentina recognise that, it is impossible to have any trade negotiations.

The Queen's Speech also refers to the Official Secrets Act. Recent events have made it necessary for us to change section 2 of that Act by statute, making it impossible for those who serve in the security service to reveal anything they discover during their service. Their lips must be sealed. Parliamentary supervision would be too wide. Certain issues are so sensitive and difficult that they must be kept within the bounds of the security service and not divulged to Parliament or anybody else. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has access to those things, but access should be limited. Section 2 should be altered, and recent events prove that we are justified in seeking an alteration.

The Queen's Speech also refers to the social services and the NHS. One cannot have good social services and a good Health Service for our aging population without sufficient funds. The demand for treatment is increasing and the provision of medical equipment is expensive. Therefore, it is essential for the nation to be prosperous and to make sufficient funds available to provide health care. Also, funds should be made available for the poorer elements of our society. Resources should be targeted at those people, and there should not be blanket provision for people who do not need it.

There should be selective but effective help for those who genuinely need extra asistance in order to make their lives tolerable. That applies particularly to the elderly. I know that there are private pension schemes, savings, and so on, which help some people and raise them out of the poverty trap. However, others are not so far-sighted or fortunate and have not been able to accumulate such resources with which to supplement their incomes. I hope that the Government will ensure that the resources made available are targeted on those who really need them.

I am satisfied that the Government are sympathetic to people. They have understood over the years that we have been in power that we need efficiency in the NHS, efficiency in the administration of money, and, above all, that sufficient money must be provided by the taxpayer. That can be provided only if society is prosperous, which it is now. I am sure that Britain's prosperity will improve even more during the next Session and that we will continue to be regarded as once again one of the great nations of the world.

7.6 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The content of the Queen's Speech could hardly have come as a surprise to anyone in the House. Everything was leaked beforehand, which is what one associates with the Government. During her speech, the Prime Minister was asked about the stories that appeared in the Sunday press regarding the Queen's non-visit to the Soviet Union. I listened to what the Prime Minister told us. She said that no decision had been reached and that the matter had not yet been raised. How is it that every Sunday paper carried the same story? It was the same sort of briefing as the Chancellor gave on pensions only two or three weeks ago. I suspect that Mr. Bernard Ingham gave a briefing on Friday or Saturday. If the matter has not yet been dealt with at the usual level between the Prime Minister and the Queen, it is extremely discourteous to Her Majesty that she should read about the Government's decision in the Sunday press. Clearly there was a Government briefing, and this is yet another example of the way in which the Government conduct their business.

The domestic content of the Queen's Speech is once again a predictable chronicle of extreme Right-wing Tory measures. Reference is made to amending the law on social security. We shall find out all the details in the next few days. I am concerned at any further change in social security legislation because all the changes that have occurred since the Government took office have worsened the position for millions of people in Britain. The last change saw millions lose all or part of their housing benefit. Undoubtedly, that has caused tremendous hardship to many, including many of my constituents. Even the inadequate transitional arrangements were introduced as a panic measure. It was not intended that they should be introduced. Because of the outcry from Labour Members and the general public and the fact that we pointed out day in, day out, the hardships being caused to our constituents, the Government decided to introduce the transitional arrangements, but I do not suppose they will last long.

We are told that there will be a measure to change the law on local government housing finance. There have been enough leaks in the past few days for us to know that was coming. Such a change will mean exorbitant rent increases. Ministers wish to see any element of rates stopped for rent purposes and they also wish to end central subsidies for council housing finance. The poorest council tenants who do not have the income necessary to pay such rent increases may be protected in some way. However, any help or subsidy will come from other council tenants. Therefore, the near-poor will be subsidising the poorest in the community.

We are certainly concerned about the way in which millions of council tenants will be penalised and discriminated against. The Government are out to fatten up the council estates to make them ready for privatisation. Under the Housing Act 1988, private landlords and property companies, as long as they are approved—for what that is worth—will be able to bid for council-owned properties and local authorities will have no way of stopping such bids succeeding if the vote, which is very warped, is carried by council tenants.

Ministers will, I believe, find that such pressures will not produce a majority of council tenants, even under the system used for voting, in favour of their properties being sold to the private sector. Council tenants know full well what would be in store for them if they became private tenants. That will be all the more so under the provisions

[Mr. David Winnick]

of the Housing Act because regulated tenancies will come to an end, there will be market rents, and security of tenure will be largely undermined.

I shall now deal with the plight of the homeless and those who are forced to stay for months or years in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and the many more inadequately housed. Many families live in a rented room because they cannot afford a mortgage or cannot get council accommodation. Other people, some with small children, live with their parents or in-laws who help them. Those things do not seem to worry the Government. This Christmas even more of our people will be forced to live in such conditions and will face great hardship and misery. Nothing in the Queen's Speech offers any help to such people.

We require far more accommodation at a reasonable rent, and the Housing Act that we debated in the last Session will not provide that. As we said when that measure was going through, people who can afford market rents will obtain a mortgage. In some cases market rents are higher than mortgage repayments would normally be. Local authorities cannot build. For example, in my borough no council accommodation has been built for nearly 10 years, and that is entirely as a result of central Government policy. Clearly, the people that I have mentioned will continue to be in a plight over housing. Tory Members will spend their Christmas in comfortable accommodation, and I do not deny that I will do the same. Are they concerned that their Government, who have been in office for nearly 10 years, are taking no steps to give assistance to people who are being penalised because they cannot afford a mortgage or a market rent?

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am interested in his detailed knowledge of local authority affairs. Could he address his mind to the problem of the enormous rent arrears on council properties in the great cities of the north of England? In Manchester, rent arrears were about £12 million last year and the amount outstanding in Liverpool is about the same. Would it not help if those arrears were collected? Are we to ignore the fact that that money is apparently to be written off by Labour local authorities?

Mr. Winnick: We can always rely on Conservative Members to exaggerate rent arrears. If rents are increased, as we predict, as a result of what is outlined in the Gracious Speech, for obvious reasons there will be more rent arrears. People cannot afford the rent levels being forced on them by the Government.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Calderdale had a hung council that was run for many years by the Tories and Liberals. In the six months from April rent arrears have gone up by 44 per cent. A child could guess why. It is because housing benefit has been so savagely cut by the Government.

Mr. Winnick: No doubt the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) will note what my hon. Friend has just said.

The Gracious Speech talks about protecting the environment. Residents in my borough of Walsall will want to know what steps are to be taken to stop the dumping and processing of toxic and poisonous waste. One firm in my borough is carrying out a public relations exercise by way of advertisements and leaflets to try to give the impression that what it is doing is for the public good. I congratulate the residents and councillors who have been protesting about the way that the firm is acting. The residents are in no way persuaded and do not want to live, any more than hon. Members would want to live, in places where poisonous and toxic waste is being dumped. They see no reason why the borough and the west midlands in general should be used for that purpose.

I should like to deal with two other matters: one domestic and the other international. Some hon. Members know that I take an interest in the security services. I was on the Select Committee on Home Affairs when it carried out an inquiry into special branch, and I wrote a minority report on the subject. I note that the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) is nodding. The Committee had a Conservative majority. When it agreed to an inquiry into special branch, the hon. Gentleman said on the radio that that would be a danger to national security. He used words to that effect. Now he seems to deny it. He certainly gave the impression on the radio that in some way we were undermining national security. We had our inquiry and produced majority and minority reports. The United Kingdom still seems safe and secure. We have not been invaded, and I doubt whether foreign agents know anything more about our secrets that they did before.

In other circumstances I would welcome the proposal in the Gracious Speech that the security services should be put on a statutory basis. However, the Government are clearly concerned far more about establishing contracts for those in the services in order to ensure absolute life-long confidentiality than about accountability. Those of us who are genuinely concerned about civil liberties want organisations in the security services, and first and foremost MI5, to have some parliamentary accountability.

There have been allegations, as we know, from Wright. As I have said before in the House, for all I know Wright may have been lying. His aim was to sell as many copies of his book as possible, and in that the Government have considerably helped him. If he is a millionaire it is because of the actions of the Prime Minister and her Cabinet colleagues. I do not know whether he lied, but he made serious allegations that some people, including himself, in the security services deliberately did their best to undermine an elected Government. There should be a judicial inquiry.

Apart from Wright's allegations, there have been allegations by someone else for whom I have a great deal of respect. I have no respect for Wright—why should I have?—either for what he did at the time or for what he has done since. He has made his revelations not out of concern for civil liberties, but only to make money. Someone against whom no one could make such an accusation is also a former employee of MI5, Cathy Massiter. She is an honourable person for whom I have much respect. She has given details, which have not been refuted in any way by the Government, about people carrying on activities that the Government may not like but which, I understand, are perfectly lawful. I am talking about campaigning for nuclear disarmament and being actively involved in the National Council for Civil Liberties. The NCCL had its telephones tapped and was spied upon.

I have already told the House about Mrs. Haigh in the west midlands. She lives in Sutton Coldfield, which is not in my constituency. She was visited by special branch but it was denied that the visit had taken place. She persisted and, following her second complaint, her Member of Parliament, the Secretary of State for Employment, wrote to the chief constable of the west midlands and it was conceded that the police had misled Mrs. Haigh and that she had been lied to. She is active in local nuclear disarmament activities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) was subjected to MI5 investigations before she became a Member of the House. She was investigated because she was the legal officer for the National Council for Civil Liberties. Is that a reason for being spied upon? Is it surprising that Labour Members think that MI5 should have some parliamentary accountability?

I must say that I am somewhat amused when those from the Liberal or Democratic Benches, whatever they may be called, talk of a Committee of senior Privy Councillors. I am not asking to be on such a Committee if there were to be one—perhaps my arm would not be twisted too much—but why should it be confined to senior Privy Councillors? What about the rest of us? Are we not as loyal? Is it suggested that our loyalty to our country, to parliamentary democracy and to the rule of law is any less than that of senior Privy Councillors? We need to get that one straight.

The essential point is that there should be some parliamentary control of MI5. I may be wrong and I may be being unfair and unjust to MI5, but I believe that among some of the MI5 people—not all, by any means—there is a political bias in the direction of the Conservative party, which undermines the security services. Like everyone else, I recognise the need for security services, as I have made plain on many occasions.

My last subject is of a totally different character. It concerns the reference in the Queen's Speech to finding

> "peaceful solutions to regional conflicts."

There are many regional conflicts. One of the worst, which has been going on for 40 years, is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. On many occasions I have hesitated to speak about this subject, because sometimes, when I listen to those arguing the Israeli case and those arguing the Palestinian case, it seems that they are taking up fixed positions, and those who argue the one side can see no justice in the other. There needs to be a just solution, however.

We know what has been happening in the occupied territories and on the West Bank in the past 12 months. We know of the injuries that have been caused and the deaths that have occurred. First and foremost, there is a need for both Israel and the Palestinians to accept mutual recognition. There is no solution, and there can never be a solution, based on Israel going out of existence, whatever the rights and wrongs of Israel coming into existence in 1948. We know why that happened: the 2,000 years of anti-Semitism, which culminated in the holocaust; and it goes without saying that I am totally committed to the state of Israel remaining in existence. However, I am not committed to an Israeli state within its present borders, and certainly not one that includes the occupied territories.

Equally, Israel can never have peace and security until the Palestinians have a state of their own. For 40 years, the Palestinians have had no state, which is why I welcome the modest but useful step of the decision taken last week in Algiers by the Palestine Liberation Organisation. I wish that it has been more clear and explicit and had spelt out in so many words that it recognised the state of Israel. It did not go so far, but, by accepting United Nations resolution 242, it implied that it recognised the existence of Israel.

When we had the PLO representative in Britain, speaking recently at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the parliamentary Labour party, he made it clear that the Palestinians have now reached the stage at which they will recognise Israel. The responsibility now rests on the Israelis, and I am extremely disappointed by the negative attitude taken by the Israeli Government last week. It would be a tragedy if the response of the Israelis in the next few months or years, if it is to carry on for that long, is simply to say, "We shall not negotiate. We have what we have and the occupied territories are simply part of the state of Israel." I fear that if that happens, it can only further undermine Israel's credibility. It may be that not only this country and the European Community but the United States will have to exercise some pressure, perhaps strong pressure, on the Israeli authorities and the incoming Israeli Government to recognise what needs to be done.

I started off by saying that the Queen's Speech contained extremely Right-wing Tory measures. The responsibility of Labour Members is to fight those measures tooth and nail at every opportunity. We shall do so in the House of Commons and we shall put our case to the country. One hopes that, by the time of the next election, enough harm will have been done by the domestic measures outlined in the Queen's Speech, by those in the Housing Act and by the poll tax, to make people recognise how essential it is that the Government are removed from office.

7.24 pm

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds): It is rare that anyone says thank you in this place, but I should like to start by thanking my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her ministerial colleagues for creating the conditions in which the area that I represent is flourishing as never before. The hon. Lady, whose father was well known to us in the House, as no doubt she will become herself—perhaps I do her an injustice—spoke of the neglect of the regions.

Ms. Quin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to point out that my father was not a member of the House. Therefore, there is some confusion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The hon. Lady has got that on the record.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: I apologise to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin), and to her father. She was saying that her region had been neglected. I can only say, from my experience as a Minister, that the north-east, the north-west, Scotland and south Wales have had more public money poured into them by Governments of both complexions than has my region of East Anglia, where only minimal public funds have been spent; but despite that, East Anglia today is more prosperous than it has ever been.

There are some obvious reasons for this prosperity: the expansion of our east coast ports benefiting from the trade with the European Community; the Cambridge

[Sir Eldon Griffiths]

phenomenon, in which academia, following the lead of Stamford university in California, is beginning to spill over into the high-tech and biotech industries that are creating the new jobs that we need. Then, too, we look forward to some, although not all, of the benefits of the expansion of Stansted airport and the better access that we now have to the City of London.

These are the macro-factors that are helping East Anglia to grow. But it is the virtuous circle of policies that my right hon. Friends have brought about, through supply side economics, and in particular the lower taxation that has led to higher economic growth and therefore to a greater abundance of public expenditure available for priority targets, that have enabled East Anglia to go ahead as never before.

Mrs. Wise: Is the hon. Gentleman not overlooking the little matter of agricultural subsidies?

Sir Eldon Griffiths: Not in the least, but they are of course national, not regional.

Turning to the Queen's Speech, I wish to make four points of which I have had some experience as a Minister. The first concerns the promised legislation to deal with local authority capital and housing finance. I am sure that it must now be right to allow our local councils to use a somewhat larger proportion of their receipts from the sale of council houses, to promote low-cost housing schemes, preferably in conjunction with housing associations, or in partnership with private builders. In my area there is a pressing need for more low-cost starter homes. One way to tackle it is to ease some of the present restrictions on local authorities' use of their receipts from council house sales.

I hope, too that, in the course of this legislation going through the House, my right hon. and hon. Friends as Ministers will look carefully at the balances that some of our local authorities have accumulated, sometimes from those sales of council houses, but also as a result of the increase in the value of land, particularly in East Anglia. My own borough authority is stuffed with cash, yet it still is proposing rate increases. The Government should consider carefully the possibility of insisting that local authorities with large balances should not increase their rates.

I also warn my hon. Friend the Minister to watch out for empire building among treasurers' departments in respect of the collection of the community charge. I was a Minister when we reformed local government in 1973 and the water industry in 1974, and I recall the proliferation of new empires that resulted from those necessary reforms. My hon. Friend will find that, in many parts of the country, treasurers' departments are looking for larger offices, more computers and larger staffs and leading their councillors to believe that all that is essential to collect the community charge. I hope that he will create a league table so that we can compare the costs and staff of the most efficient and prudent authorities and the manner in which they collect that charge with those of the less provident authorities.

Secondly, I turn to the environment. For my sins, I was an Environment Minister for four years. I welcome the reference to the environment in the Queen's Speech, as I welcomed my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's speech at the Mansion house, but I hope that the House will not conclude that we are starting something new here. This country polluted its environment earlier and to a greater degree than almost any other country, but, for that reason, we made a start on tackling our environmental pollution much earlier than anyone else. I believe I am correct in saying that the alkali inspectorate was established in this country in 1904. In 1970 we set up the world's first department of the environment. In 1972 we led the world conference on the environment that set up the United Nations environmental secretariat. I might even have signed the relevant declaration in Stockholm.

Britain does not lag behind, but, for the most part, it has been in the lead in environmental policies. It is a matter of pride that we have cleaned the air over our great cities more than anyone else and that there are now fish in the Thames. It is recognised worldwide that we introduced the first effective legislation on toxic waste and that we have made important progress in providing compensation, and in some cases insulation, against excessive noise. The United Kingdom has a proud record in that respect.

Of course we need to go further. I therefore make three observations to my hon. Friend the Minister which stem from my limited experience.

First, the job of doing what is required to tackle pollution, instead of just talking about it, is very much a matter of practical operations and not simply of great speeches or of passing complex laws. Protecting the environment is a matter of the environmental health inspector poking about in the incinerators, of the river pollution officer doing his stuff on the river bank, and of the work of all those unsung heroes of environmental management whom we are fortunate to have in this country. So let us put more emphasis on the practicalities and on the public and private sectors working together than on making grandiose speeches.

Secondly, the Government should not allow themselves to be pushed into absolute standards. It is easy to state that the number of permitted grains that can be admitted to the air shall be X, or that the level of nitrate pollution shall be Y. Far better to follow the time-honoured approach of the best practicable means. The absolute standards that we have seen in the United States, particularly in Los Angeles, can sometimes be counter-productive. An absolute standard is created by the legislature. Many businesses cannot immediately meet that standard without stopping production and laying off their employees, causing unemployment.

The result is not progress, but an adversarial relationship between the Government and the industries that are to be controlled. But an adversarial relationship, and the litigation that goes with it, achieves very little progress in the environment. What matters is the collaboration of industry and the Government, which is best achieved by the British approach of the best practicable means. I hope that the Government will not allow themselves to be pushed by Europe or by the Greens in this country away from our experience of the best practicable means.

Thirdly, we can tackle pollution only if we have the resources. It used to be said that growth was the antithesis of a good environment. My experience is that it is only when a Government create those conditions for economic growth where the revenue is available that the environmental job can be properly done. That is why I welcome the fact that, as we now have those improved revenues, the Government can contemplate the movement of more resources to the improvement of our beaches and our air and to toxic waste disposal. However, none of those things can be done unless the resources are first generated and our people are prepared to pay the price for cleaning up the environment.

My next point follows from that made by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) about security. I welcome the prospect of a stronger and perhaps more comprehensive Prevention of Terrorism Bill. I echo my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in making an appeal to the Opposition. The House should not be divided on this issue. Over the years I have regretted the fact that, on three-line Whips, the Labour party has so often voted against the renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. I am aware of, and respect, the anxieties of Opposition Members, but I hope that the House will take a united position on terrorism. When the House is divided on this matter, the message that goes out is wholly injurious to those in the security forces and the police who seek to protect us against those evil men.

I welcome the prospect of legislation that will require candidates in Northern Ireland to declare that they are opposed to terrorism before they stand for election. However, I find it strange that we shall do that in one part of the United Kingdom, but not throughout the country. It goes without saying that candidates standing for election to this House hardly need to make such a declaration—I have never had any doubt about that—but I find it passing strange that we shall insist on a declaration of anti-terrorism for those who stand for election to the House in one part of the United Kingdom, yet not insist on the same requirement for all candidates. I do not like this discrimination that will be applied against our future colleagues who may come from Northern Ireland.

My further comments lead me in the opposite direction from that of the hon. Member for Walsall, North. I understand why the Cabinet has concluded that it wants to put the Security Service on a statutory footing. I see the many advantages of that, but I am not sure that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary will also see the pitfalls along the road upon which they have embarked.

First—I can say this from my experience of police operations in Britain and Northern Ireland—it is exceedingly difficult to conduct a police operation, especially one that on occasion has to be covert, if there are exchanges in the House about it. I would be the last person ever to want the House to be gagged—in any event, it could not be—and I know that for the most part hon. Members will conduct themselves with restraint when they know that an operation could be under way and that unwise remarks in this place could compromise the lives of those involved. None the less, remarks can be made in the House on the basis of newspaper stories, speculation or while making party points in the heat of the moment, which we all do. But we shall be embarking on a dangerous track if, even in this House, comment is bandied about on security operations that are under way.

My second anxiety is a parliamentary one and is based on definitions——

Mr. Winnick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Eldon Griffiths: I do not wish to prolong my remarks.

Mr. Winnick: I shall be brief. I recognise some of the problems that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned about security operations, but it is not likely that the House would be told beforehand of such operations. We are aware of the fight against terrorism and we recognise it. I ask the hon. Gentleman to deal, perhaps only briefly, with some of the challenges that have been made, such as the Cathy Massiter statements. As I said earlier, people have been harassed—their telephones have been tapped, for example. This has happened because of political views, not because of military-security operations in Northern Ireland. One example is the experience of my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman).

Sir Eldon Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman must forgive me if I do not go into those matters at length. They require a much more detailed answer than I could give at this moment.

My second anxiety is a parliamentary one that is based on definitions. A statute must be precise. I am sure that the parliamentary draftsmen, among others, will recognise that. But how are we to define such concepts as the defence of the realm? Against whom is it to be protected? What is national security? Who is to be the judge? How do we measure subversion? How do we apply these concepts to individual cases? When the Bill is considered in Committee, ways must be found of determining the meaning of the defence of the realm, national security and subversion, for example. It will be interesting to examine such a Bill in Committee, but I hope that I am not a member of the Committee.

I have thought much about these matters and I am as keen as anyone on accountability to the House. Indeed, I have been accountable to the House. I recognise, too, that there are many in the police and security services who want a statutory basis for their activities. I can see no way, however, in which a Committee, whether it is comprised of lofty Privy Councillors—heaven only knows why they should be different from anyone else—or other hon. Members, could effectively undertake the task of surveillance of the Security Service. Nor do I see how one or more of Her Majesty's judges could take on that role. In the end, I am driven to the conclusion—this applies to whichever party is in power—that we have to trust the Home Secretary. At the end of the day, the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister are accountable to the House. I do not see a way of interposing between the Home Secretary, the Prime Minister and the House another group that is designed to second-guess what the Security Service is about.

During the summer I spent a deal of time assisting—I make no bones about it—someone with whom I had the good fortune to be at Yale university. George Bush has done better than me, but I was glad to give his campaign such support as I could in one of the key areas of the United States. It is a fact that the Anglo-American special relationship has never been so strong as it is now. I say "never" even though I think back to Winston Churchill's day, when we were the only ally of the United States. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the United States was our only ally on the Atlantic front.

Today, however, the Japanese, the Germans and many others are allies of the United States, yet it is the British who stand higher than them all. The reasons are in part the restoration of our economic strength, the strengthening of our defences and the resolution that we have shown in the

[Sir Eldon Griffiths]

pursuit of our own interests and those of the alliance; but there is another factor that is relevant to the special relationship. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has established a most extraordinary personal-political constituency across the United States.

This is a British matter, not a partisan one. It is good that our Prime Minister, whether one talks to someone in Atlanta, San Francisco, Florida or Iowa, is regarded as a person of immense importance to the world. I cannot quantify to what extent that leads some American importers to prefer, perhaps, to take a Jaguar instead of a Mercedes. I cannot say whether it leads to the marginal decision of an American tourist to visit London rather than Rome. I wager, however, that this personal factor is worth many billions of dollars to Britain. We should be glad of that, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on achieving this extra-special relationship on our behalf.

The special relationship that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has developed with President Reagan has been an important one—I believe that she will be able to extend it into the presidency of Mr. Bush. The more she can do so the better. I say that for two reasons. First, the United States is gradually switching its attention from the European front towards the Pacific, and to a lesser extent to South America. More of America's economic growth is on the Pacific coast and more of the pressures and tensions are to the south of it. But for us it is of great importance that the Americans should remain committed on the European front, and it is the present Prime Minister more than anyone else who can achieve that for us.

The Americans certainly need to deal with their deficit. I doubt whether they can do so by cutting defence expenditure. Nor will they be able to do it by cutting welfare expenditure, because their country, like ours, is greying and more will need to be spent on the elderly and the sick. Their best hope is to reduce their deficit by reducing the proportion of their governmental revenue that is used to pay interest on their existing debt, just as we have in Britain. We have a good record, because for the first time in my life the public sector borrowing requirement has been replaced by PSDR, or public sector debt payment. America needs to do the same, to reduce each year the size of its public debt and therefore the proportion of its revenue that is used to pay interest on the debt. So Britain has something to offer, and I believe that out experience can and will be offered tactfully by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in her relations with Mr. Bush.

I wish my right hon. Friend well, as I wish the Government well, in the new programme before us.

7.49 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I am very pleased to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker and somewhat surprised that I have done so this early. I want to contain my comments to paragraphs three to six of the Gracious Speech. My points will have a direct relationship to the comments made by the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths), who referred to the particular relationship between the Prime Minister and the United States and the influence that the United States has on our policies and we have on theirs.

I want to refer particularly to the comments in the Gracious Speech about the

> "maintenance of national security and the preservation of peace with freedom and justice."

Justice seems to demand assurances of honesty, candour and some consistency. The sixth paragraph states that the Government intend to

> "continue to play a full part in the work . . . for peaceful solutions".

It seems that we have reason for hope, especially if we remember the comments made by Mikhail Gorbachev when he landed in Brize Norton on his way to the United States. Many people thought that his comments were very encouraging. Mr. Gorbachev said that the Soviets had a secret weapon, in that they could deprive us of an enemy. That is an important statement.

The NATO Alliance was founded almost 40 years ago to counter a threat which was thought at the time to be a threat to democracy; some people still believe that today. Although the Warsaw pact did not exist 40 years ago, it was thought that the Eastern bloc countries posed a threat to Western democracy. Western democracy had to be preserved, so the Alliance was founded.

Within the context of the relationship referred to by the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds, let us consider some attitudes within the Alliance. The international seminar for opinion leaders was held at the NATO defence college between 26 October and 28 October of this year. I cannot get more recent than that. In the inaugural address, Dr. Fred Iklé, an eminent military analyst who has received two of the Pentagon's most prestigious awards, stated categorically that Mikhail Gorbachev was charming and capable, but that he might change, and that he was not "eternal"—Dr. Iklé's word, not mine. He also said that, if Mr. Gorbachev did not become Stalin No. 2, he might be followed by Stalin No. 2. In other words, Dr. Iklé clearly believes that the Russians are unreliable and may cheat on their word.

I want to balance the statement from Dr. Fred Iklé with one from Dr. Robert McGeehan, one of the seminar leaders at the college. Quoting him from memory, I believe he said: "We didn't expect the Soviet Union to accept the zero option; we should have removed it from the table a long time before." He said that the Russians caught us by surprise. That is a clear admission of the cynical tabling of a proposal simply for public relations advantage. Bearing that in mind, it is all the more credit to Mikhail Gorbachev for realising the opportunity and seizing it while he had the chance. Furthermore, in case anyone thinks I am being partisan, it is all the more credit to Ronald Reagan for standing by the commitment. However, where does that discovery leave us when we consider the so-called modernisation of the weapons which will be removed by the INF treaty, which has caused so much trouble?

Sir Eldon Griffiths: It leaves them in place.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds would accept that modernisation suggests an extension, but is that true? We must consider that modernisation involves transforming weapons from land-launched to air and sea-launched. That is not really modernisation. It moves weapons into a different class. Instead of mutually agreed disarmament, the Russians have beaten us to it. They are dismantling more weapons more quickly—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds is trying to intervene from a sedentary position. In my tender years, I am going deaf. I try as best I can to hear the hon. Gentleman, but sadly I cannot. I promise the hon. Gentleman that I am not ignoring him. If he chooses to intervene, I will gladly give way.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: Of course I do not dissent from the hon. Gentleman's statement that the Soviets are dismantling more. However, they have a great many more to dismantle. We must have asymmetrical reductions.

Mr. Cook: I am so pleased that the hon. Gentleman took the groundbait. He has put on record the fact that, although we claim to have negotiated from a position of strength, the strength was on the Soviet side. There was no concession to the deployment of cruise or Pershing, as the hon. Gentleman has already conceded. The Soviets had more and they could have hit us harder than we could ever have hit them. The concession is one really to common sense, good logic and care about creation.

I promise the House that I will not drop names. However, I freely admit that I am not well informed or an expert on anything. I consider Helmut Schmidt a man of fair experience, and one would ignore the words of such an experienced statesman at one's peril. His comment on the so-called modernisation and need to match developments that are allegedly taking place in the Soviet Union—allegations which are entirely baseless and unfounded—is that the Soviet Union has no intention of replacing the missiles it is dismantling. If the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds is right, the Soviets would not need to do that, because they have too many anyway.

I want to refer once more to the statement made by Dr. Fred Iklé to the opinion leaders in Rome. He said that glasnost was not working. The Soviets are still keeping their budget secret. He said that they would not divulge the budget and then said that they have amassed $300 billion-worth of arms more than we have.

I ask you—I mean the House, Mr. Deputy Secretary; I would not ask you because that would make my question personal and I would not put that onus on you for all the billions of dollars that there may be in the world—how can Dr. Fred Iklé possibly know that they have $300 billion more than we have if the Soviets are so secretive about their budget? How does that square with the revelations recently about projects such as stealth technology, which have been funded covertly without the knowledge of the Senate or the House of Representatives? Who keeps the budget secret?

Is the truth not more reasonable—that Soviet accountancy, implicit in their economic order, is of such a kind that the Soviet Union cannot publish figures in the same way that we do because it does not examine its income and expenditure in the same way that we do? Is not that statement an honest assessment of the differences between the two systems? It is not secrecy but a difference in the language of accountancy. We can hardly expect the Soviet Union to change the basis of its language overnight.

The contradictions that I am trying to put before the House must be clear to all, but I must continue. Dr. Iklé went on to tell us that technology transfer flows in one direction—from West to East. In other words, technology is developed by us and, somehow or other, gained by the Soviet Union. Yet, at the North Atlantic Assembly's plenary session in Hamburg last week, as part of my duties I had to attend the scientific and technological committee. The expert rapporteur on technology transfer told us—wonder of wonders—that five times more licences are bought by us from the Soviet Union than the Soviet Union buys from us. So much for the technical flow being from West to East. Moreover, those licences cover a broad range of technologies—ceramics and metallurgy as well as weaponry.

It is no good the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) sitting there in splendid isolation with his arms folded shaking his head in disbelief. I make him the same offer that I made to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds: does the hon. Gentleman wish to intervene?

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I do not see what the hon. Gentleman is seeking to prove. Perhaps the Soviets do not need to purchase more than five times as many because they already have the information.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman clearly has not been listening.

Mr. Holt: I have listened to every word.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman clearly has not heard. I shall go over the point once again.

Dr. Iklé, a prestigious spokesman on behalf of the Alliance, said in an inaugural statement to the seminar at the NATO defence college in Rome that technology transfer is from West to East. The expert rapporteur, speaking to the North Atlantic Assembly's scientific and technical committee, proved, quoting figures and examples, that the technology flow is much greater from East to West.

My point, if the hon. Gentleman can latch on to it, difficult though it may be for him, is that untruths are being recorded here. Untruths are being passed to so-called opinion leaders within the Alliance. If the Alliance is meant to withstand the threat to democracy, should it not be based on honesty, candour and consistency which provide the basis for the justice to which I referred when I began? I shall pass on, as the hon. Gentleman seems finally to have understood my point.

Mr. Holt: I wonder whether the source of most of the hon. Gentleman's information is the senior consul from the Russian embassy to whom he was speaking outside last week.

Mr. Cook: Do I have to repeat myself? The statements that I am referring to were made directly to me, one by an expert witness to the North Atlantic Assembly's scientific and technical committee, the record of which can be checked—I shall even provide the hon. Gentleman with a written copy of that submission when it has been translated—the other by Dr. Fred Iklé, a spokesman for the Pentagon. The Soviet Union did not have to feed me any information on this occasion. The hon. Gentleman amply illustrates the unheeding stance of some politicians, few though there are on the Conservative Benches, who cannot accept the logic of something even when it hits them between the eyes. I shall try to give the hon. Gentleman some ammunition if he chooses to keep his ears open more carefully.

The licences cover a wide range of matters, particularly powder metallurgy techniques, on which we are not quite as advanced as the Soviet Union. At the time, there was a suggestion that the reason why we buy five times more licences from the Soviet Union than they buy from us was——

Mr. Holt: They have spies.

Mr. Cook: There we are: the hon. Gentleman is one jump ahead of me. Yes. The Soviet Union was so much cleverer at stealing them from us—and selling them back? Do we really believe that? Are we so secretive in our society —this society that we defend—that we allow people to steal them from the closeness of our chests and then flog them back to us? If that is true, either it is a comment on the ineptitude and inefficiency of our counter-espionage —if it exists—or it means that our spies are not so very clever at stealing them back. If this inefficient Marxist-Leninist suppressive system is so bad, how has it managed to do this? Furthermore, if people over there reject their system so energetically, why are they prepared to give us the secrets if we are prepared to give them the secrets? It is all frivolous argument——

Mr. Holt: So is your speech.

Mr. Cook: —but it is fair comment on the kind of bigotry and bias that we see displayed by some Conservative Members, when they are here.

Dr. Fred Iklé went on to say that there was no question but that we could continue to resist the threat. He said that our Alliance would have the economic strength, especially if we included Japan. That was an expert spokesman for the Alliance. I want to ask the representatives of Her Majesty's Government when Japan was invited to the North Atlantic table and by whom. No one at the plenary session of the North Atlantic Assembly in Hamburg last week had any knowledge of it. How would such a quest to include Japan in the Alliance square with the pious statement of intent—the quest for peaceful solutions—contained in the Gracious Speech? How can we be seeking hands of friendship and at the same time be adding partners to make the counter-threat more ominous?

While Dr. Iklé was making those comments, Dr. Robert McGeehan was making other statements at the seminar in Rome. He said that Gorbachev's secret weapon was to say yes. He went on to say that that terrified many military analysts. I have been trying to highlight the contradictions. In other words, many of the military analysts from NATO admit their terror—"terrified" was Dr. McGeehan's word—that the threat that they have used as a justification for increased expenditure on arms was to be removed. I could accept their terror at the threat being removed if it was prompted by the threat of their jobs being removed, but I do not believe that it is as simple as that.

If we are conscientious about our work, we should all endeavour to put ourselves out of jobs. We should seek to remove the need for legislation. If we create an equitable society, there should never be a need to make laws again. If we seek to achieve an educated society, we should seek to educate people to such a standard that they never again need educating. We should try to work ourselves out of a job, but here we have senior NATO military panellists saying that the secret weapon of saying yes terrified many of them.

They have used that threat as an excuse to increase arms expenditure, which has meant profit for the United States in particular. Now the United States is calling for more burden-sharing. I can understand why it is doing so, because the United States' budget is in an unholy mess. Nevertheless, if there is to be any serious, clinical, logical burden-sharing, we should first identify the size of the burden. To do so, we must engage in genuine threat assessment. We must calculate precisely the nature of the threat, from which direction it comes, its size, how best to counteract it, and how much such counteraction will cost. Only when all those factors have been calculated can we talk sensibly about burden-sharing. Currently, we are applying a logic that will serve only to put more profits in the pockets of the armourers.

The American budget cannot stand the cost, and we know that the Soviet budget cannot either, because the Russians have already been driven by economic constraints to the peace table. Nor can our country stand the cost. So a first priority of burden-sharing must be genuine threat assessment.

Dr. McGeehan was good enough to define deterrence: as a means of discouraging even the thought that a military adventure may have a pay-off in the West. He stated that the Soviet Union has 11,000 strategic warheads, whereas the United States has 14,000. I believe that he included in that, as single units, multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles. In any event, that is some deterrence—deterrence times 50, or enough to wipe out the whole world 50 times over. Yet the Soviet Union states unequivocally that it has a policy of "no first use". The Alliance refuses to make the same commitment, and we insist on a Mexican stand-off based on "We dare if you dare" rather than "We won't if you won't".

We already provide any potential enemy, and not only the Soviet Union, with a nuclear deterrent. It is free to them but very costly to us. It takes the shape and form of every nuclear power station on our territory. The strategic use of a conventional attack on such targets would not result in nationwide deprivation of energy supplies but would incur nationwide nuclear contamination. Dr. McGeehan added that deterrence, to be credible, must display a readiness to engage in active use.

We do not need nuclear weapons to pose a nuclear threat to the Soviet Union, because it has 150 nuclear power stations, the exact locations of which we already know. Is not an armoury of 150 Chernobyls enough for anyone? Is that not sufficient deterrence? If one operator going beyond the bounds of a procedure manual can cause the problems that Chernobyl did, surely one or 150 strategically placed ICBMs would cause untold havoc. There is no justification for the nuclear weaponry that Dr. McGeehan mentions. Nevertheless, he adds:

> "No matter how much asymetrical conventional disarmament takes place, we will still need nuclear weapons as a deterrent because they deter."

We do not need them. They are provided by our potential enemies for us, as we provide them for our potential enemies.

Dr. McGeehan also commented:

> "INF can be a real threat to the Alliance."

I am sure that he did not mean that in an adverse sense —or I hope he did not, because moves towards peace are bound to remove the threat and thus the need for the Alliance, even though that in turn would increase the threat to Dr. McGeehan's job.

I have tried to point out the contradictions between the stances adopted by some north American spokesmen with whom the Prime Minister has a particular relationship, as we were reminded by the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds, who has left the Chamber. I have given the bad news, and now I hope to give the good news. I quote the West German Premier, Mr. Kohl, speaking at the plenary session in Hamburg last Thursday:

> "Trust must be built up everywhere, in every area of concern."

He added:

> "We must insist on the exclusively defensive task of our armed forces, which the West has always maintained should be their aim."

That was confirmed by NATO's secretary-general when he addressed another, lengthier session:

> "We want less and not more weapons. This alliance has always been a defensive one. We only keep the minimum force necessary to keep our own security."

That suggests that the emphasis is returning to the original need for the Alliance. So not all is bad faith, thank God. I say that not as a profanity but as a fervent prayer. It is a necessary assurance when one reads the trailers flaunted by this lapdog press of ours, in reporting that there have already been warnings—if one is to believe such stories —to the Queen that she ought to reject any invitation from the Soviet Union, if one is forthcoming.

I am astounded at the mental gymnastics that have been in evidence since those reports, in an attempt at justification. We have heard some here tonight from the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes), who frequently waves the Union Jack. I do not blame him for that; I too have fought for the Union flag. But if we are dragging up bits of history from 70 years ago about the killing of the Romanovs—presumably by the Gorbachevs—we are finding a strange barrel to scrape.

The hon. Gentleman is not in his place, but I hope that he will read *Hansard* tomorrow. Perhaps he should be reminded that since that sad epoch—I do not approve of what happened to the Romanovs—the people of whom we are speaking have fought side by side with us to resist the Fascist threat that sought to establish the Third Reich. In so doing, they lost 21·5 million of their population.

Mr. Holt: Only after they were invaded.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman sits there smirking and saying, "Only after they were invaded"——

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Cook: No, I shall not give way.

Mr. Holt: The hon. Gentleman mentioned me. It is a convention of the House for him to give way.

Mr. Cook: I have not said anything about the hon. Gentleman yet, but I am about to. He sits there smirking and nodding and accusing the Soviets of coming into the war only after they were invaded. Many accusations are made against the Soviet Union for not keeping international treaties. Let me give the hon. Gentleman a history lesson.

Rightly or wrongly, the Soviet Union had signed a non-aggression pact with Germany. Would you—I beg your pardon, Madam Deputy Speaker; I know that you would never be so treacherous, although I am not at all sure about other hon. Members—would the hon. Member for Langbaurgh wish the Soviet Union to have broken that treaty, simply to justify the illogicality of his argument today? It was Germany that broke the treaty; and, in a way, was it not fortunate for us that Germany chose to do so? At that time we had few other allies who were able to come directly to our aid. Were we not lucky that Herr Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, and that the Soviet Union came in on our side? Does that not make it even more preposterous to rake up the Romanovs at this point in history, to try to justify a smack in the mouth of Gorbachev while at the same time extending the hand of friendship?

I also remind the House that the Spanish royal family has already seen the good sense of extending the hand of friendship. But from the few hon. Members who have chosen to occupy the Conservative Benches this evening —no more than a handful—we are hearing some sort of justification for rejecting the Soviet Union's advances of friendship, perpetuating the cold war mentality within the United Kingdom Parliament. I could expect that from other nations, but here, where we pride ourselves on sound logic and common sense, I find it depressing and more than a little frightening that hon. Members should seek to return to that 1950s mentality.

Mr. Holt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No, I will not.

Mr. Holt: The hon. Gentleman said he would.

Mr. Cook: That was some time ago. The hon. Gentleman has missed his opportunity.

The contradiction must be evident to all: we have heard pious words in the Gracious Speech and counter-statements from the Conservative Benches. Now I shall give way to the hon. Member for Langbaurgh.

Mr. Holt: May I examine the logic of what the hon. Gentleman is saying? It was the gullibility of the Russians and the belief that they would not be attacked by the Germans that caused them to sign that agreement. If we were to take Gorbachev at face value in the same way, we could well be invaded as well.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman seeks to visit the sins of the Germans—who are now our allies—on the Soviet Union. Can I really believe that that is the kind of logic that the hon. Gentleman learned at school? If so, it frightens me, because I went to the same school.

Mr. Holt: I went first, and learned better.

Mr. Cook: As the school was run by Jesuits at the time, I would prefer a Jesuit assessment. The Jesuits taught us that we should never compromise with error. But now the hon. Gentleman, who went to the school in 1943, I believe——

Mr. Holt: It was 1940.

Mr. Cook: Having been to the school in 1940, the hon. Gentleman will know a good deal about what the Soviets had promised the Germans, and what the Germans had promised the Soviets. Is he now saying that, although it was the bad faith of the Germans that brought the Soviet Union into the war; although the Soviets were our allies for five years; although we supplied them with arms in the Atlantic convoys; although our service men received awards for bravery for taking them those weapons; although the Soviets received bravery awards for using them; although we jointly defeated the threat to Western democracy posed by the Axis—is he saying that, after all that, the Russians are capable of bad faith, despite having lost 21·5 million of their population?

Mr. Holt: Yes.

Mr. Cook: I have never heard such nonsense in all my life. It is absolute rubbish. That is the mentality that threatens the prospect of any improvement in relations between East and West. It is the mentality that threatens detente. We are in danger of erring on the side not of caution but of insult.

We must remember that we have had 40 years of cold war—40 years too many. If we throw an opportunity such as this back in the face of the Soviet Union, as the hon. Member for Langbaurgh seems to wish us to, it may be the last opportunity that we are ever given. Surely all hon. Members have more sense than that.

8.28 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I am tempted to follow the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) on the subject of the Soviet Union, because I have a personal interest in that country. In reply to his last remark about the cold war, I should like to put it on record that a day or two ago my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that the cold war had come to an end, and she gave credit to Mikhail Gorbachev for bringing it to an end. That of itself would tend to undermine the hon. Gentleman's entire speech, but I shall not rub it in.

My personal interest, incidentally, stems partly from having learnt Russian at school and then as a postgraduate student at Moscow university. While I was there in 1961, the Berlin wall was being built. I remember the Russians, with their great resources of humour, asking each other whether this meant that we were about to have a war. The answer was no, there would not be a war, but there would be such a hell of a fight for peace that there would not be a stone left standing. We are now in a period of a fight for peace and we seem to be doing well.

However, before I pass on to the main point of my speech, I should like to remind the hon. Member for Stockton, North that what happens in the Soviet Union depends not on his speech, my speech, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's speeches, the speech made by Fred Iklé or the speeches or actions of the President of the United States of America, but on the Soviet people.

The wisest observation that has been made on Mr. Gorbachev's future in the past few weeks has come from a secret source—the deputy head of the Central Intelligence Agency. He said that Mr. Gorbachev had not yet begun to tackle the serious problems in his country. As the hon. Member for Stockton, North would agree, those problems are predominantly fundamental economic problems, such as the structure of prices in the Soviet Union, rents, labour and labour mobility. Mr. Gorbachev, in his wisdom, has been rather cautious about confronting those problems head on.

The deputy head of the CIA also said that Mr. Gorbachev was trying to switch over gradually from driving on the left-hand side of the road to driving on the right-hand side. I shall not go into detail on his remarks because I do not want to detain the House, but I must say that there is a certain wisdom in those remarks. Before becoming too excited about our ability to influence events in the Soviet Union, we should remember that Mr. Gorbachev faces severe problems and, try as we might, we cannot influence them, even at the margin.

Mr. Frank Cook: The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) is right. He has described the range and depth of problems that Mr. Gorbachev faces in changing the nature of Soviet society. That is an enormous task, and we must understand how long it will take him. To make accusations of bad faith, as has been done this evening, and to express a lack of belief in Mr. Gorbachev may put his efforts in jeopardy. We must offer the embrace of friendship and give an incentive, and that has been acknowledged by the announcement today of visits to psychiatric hospitals in the Soviet Union. The Russians are opening their society to us. Does the hon. Member for Buckingham agree that that is positive proof of their anxiety to match us move for move?

Mr. Walden: As I said earlier, I am tempted to discuss this matter further, but I shall not do so because I have other matters to raise. Ultimately, it is not a question of whether we believe in Mr. Gorbachev. That is a rather sentimental formulation. What matters is whether Mr. Gorbachev will survive, and we have no means of knowing or ensuring that. I draw the conclusion that we must maintain our defences as well as the most intimate diplomacy that we can contrive. I should have thought that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's personal success in relations with the Soviet Union and the invitation to Mr. Gorbachev to come to this country—which he has accepted—are proof that the Government are doing what they can, within the strict limits of the possible, to ensure that Mr. Gorbachev's efforts are welcomed in this country.

I shall now follow my own logic of concentrating on what one can do to help oneself. I want to deal with a strictly domestic matter. In the Gracious Speech, Her Majesty said:

> "My Government will continue to attach very great importance to protecting our environment, both nationally and internationally."

Clearly, that refers to greater and more global matters than the one with which I shall deal in my speech.

I want to talk about a concrete matter, concerning the environment, in my constituency. Last week, I opened an exhibition in the village of Tingewick, just outside Buckingham. It concerned a bypass which the villagers of Tingewick have been trying to secure for many years. I am pleased to see the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport on the Front Bench this evening, and I express my personal gratitude to him for agreeing to come to look at the situation at the end of this week. Many hon. Members have problems concerning bypasses and I do not underestimate the problem that my hon. Friend faces in that respect. However, I must stress that the problem in Tingewick is a special one and not simply a matter of local agitation. It is almost a desperate matter for the villagers of Tingewick.

I shall give the House some flavour of the problem, and place on record the fact that there have been three deaths and six injuries so far this year in Tingewick. A recent survey has shown that 13,639 vehicles passed along the A421, on which Tingewick lies, in one day alone and, of those, 1,899 were heavy goods vehicles. It may require a little imagination for those who do not live in a village to understand what that means. I should like to quote the words of a local resident, Mrs. Rumble, who wrote:

> "The main street through the village is very narrow and winding"—

the main street is 16 ft across; a little wider than the Gangway of the House—

> "therefore a HGV travelling at 30 mph and faster produces a suction of air that nearly blows an adult pedestrian from their

> feet to say nothing of a child. In wet weather conditions, the spray from the vehicles soaks pedestrians and property in a muddy film. The speeding cars through Tingewick produce a hazard to our residents, especially the children for even though a pedestrian crossing has been installed, very often cars in a hurry fail to stop. The pedestrian crossing has been been put out of action on occasions because of passing traffic mounting the pavement and knocking out the traffic light. Large vehicles and cars park on the pavement, restricting access to pedestrians.
>
> We in the village obtain very little rest from the above problems, at night or at the weekend. Locally on a Sunday a regularly held Sunday market boosts the traffic during Sunday morning, and it seems that Sunday afternoon is set aside for wide and difficult loads to pass us by!"

I could multiply such descriptions. For the benefit of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, I should like to recall one or two details of the history of the attempt to secure a bypass in Tingewick.

In 1981, Buckinghamshire county council did not consider that there was any likelihood of providing Tingewick with a bypass in the next 15 years due to financial restrictions and greater priorities elsewhere in the county. In 1982, the county council included the Tingewick bypass in a 15-year plan for possible major projects. In 1983, the traffic count showed an increase from 600 per hour to 1,200 per hour. I shall come to the reasons for that later. In October 1984, the Tingewick bypass was included in a five-year plan to begin in 1989-90. Then, in March 1986, news broke that the bypass would be delayed because of the latest expenditure restrictions. Those facts paint the picture—the villagers' hopes of relief were raised and shortly afterwards dashed.

Why am I raising the matter of a small community in the House? Clearly, it is partly because it is a constituency matter to which I attach importance. However, a wider issue is at stake. One reason for the massive increase in traffic through that small north Buckinghamshire village is Milton Keynes. We all know that Milton Keynes is a great success and that it has some splendid roads of its own, but the access routes to Milton Keynes are suffering—not benefiting—from the town's success.

As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Transport knows, when the M40 is extended, one of the natural links between the M1 and the M40 will pass through Tingewick. In other words, one faces the prospect of those two massive arteries, which run north to south through the United Kingdom, having as one link a 16 ft spread of road with massive lorries passing along it. I am not exaggerating when I say that the wing mirrors of those lorries pass within inches of the pedestrians on the narrow pavement. That is intolerable and inhuman and something must be done.

I am fully aware that there is a problem about priorities: my hon. Friend has a problem about priorities and Buckinghamshire county council has a problem about priorities. However, I should like to remind my hon. Friend of one or two figures that I have obtained from the county council. A recent letter from the policy and resources committee chairman states:

> "The County Council is faced with a continuing decline in its capital allocations set by central government. Last year I referred to the decline in the Council's transport capital allocation from £9·1 m in 1984-85 to £4·6 m in 1987-88. For 1988-89 the allocation is £2·7 m and thus the rate at which the Council can carry out the many desirable road schemes is further reduced."

Obviously, I have looked at the county council's priorities and naturally I should like to see Tingewick at the top of the list. However, in all fairness I must note that we live in a thriving area of the country. That means that the weight of traffic in the areas around Aylesbury and High Wycombe is growing—and so too, are the problems. Therefore, I should like to draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister to the critical situation in the village of Tingewick. It is a small place. I have 120 villages in my constituency, but I have never seen anything as bad as the situation faced by the inhabitants of that village. In saying that, I do not want to underestimate the problems of other areas which are also suffering from the welcome economic growth of the whole area. Winslow on the A413 is having a pretty bad time and the inhabitants of Waddesdon on the A41 have a pretty difficult time also.

I could raise other matters now with my hon. Friend, but I prefer to do so by correspondence. All our problems relate to the growth of traffic in the area. I refer especially to the village of Turweston, which was a quiet community of 140 people whose lives have now been changed by the Brackley bypass. I shall get in touch with my hon. Friend in the hope that he can do something to lessen the noise and pollution there.

What I am saying is pretty close to what was said earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths), in that I welcome the results of the Government's economic policies as I see them in my constituency, whether in Milton Keynes or in Aylesbury. However, my hon. Friend the Minister has a difficult task because he must ensure that the indirect effects of economic growth on the environment are well understood by the Government and that the Government are prepared to put in the resources to enable people to benefit from the expansion instead of having their environment adversely affected.

8.45 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Over the next few days many things will be said about the Gracious Speech, and over the next 12 months Bill after Bill will be brought before the House, and I can promise that they will be opposed vigorously by the Opposition. For month after month, we will be subjected to legislation from the Government that will freeboot our civil liberties, destroy what is left of the welfare state and make even more scapegoats of minority groups.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Sir E. Griffiths) is not in his place, because he made a few comments about terrorism and I should like to put it to him that a terrorist is a terrorist. Opposition Members are not very impressed with that kind of speech when we see the Conservative party invite a well-known terrorist such as Calero from Nicaragua to one of its fringe meetings. I should have liked to ask the hon. Gentleman, "When is a terrorist not a terrorist?"

The Gracious Speech holds no promises of a peaceful and secure future for my constituents. It offers more and more of the same—despair for the homeless. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) is no longer on the Front Bench because I have with me some shameful headlines from the local press that he shares with me. Those headlines refer to the rising rate of homelessness and to the "shame of Christmas homeless" in Calderdale. I regret that he is not here to hear me, because my constituency of Halifax shares the same local authority as his constituency and we never had a problem with homelessness until this Government took office.

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

We are not an inner-city area. We are a small industrial town—no, a reasonably sized, not too small, industrial town—and we did not know about homelessness until the disastrous policies of this Government were introduced. I see nothing in the Gracious Speech to alleviate the problems that we now face. I see nothing in the Gracious Speech to help industry. Constituencies such as mine still rely on manufacturing industry to a large extent for employment of the majority of our people.

What I do see in the Gracious Speech is the statement: "firm financial policies designed to bear down on inflation." In real-speak that means a continuation of high interest rates, a strong pound and all the other disastrous policies that are leading industries into trouble yet again. It is not an understatement to say that a first-year economics student would recognise that the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his policies are heading manufacturing industry towards another 1981-82. That part of the economy is in a mess, and no matter how much the Chancellor huffs and puffs—and he does that regularly, like an inefficient geyser—on or off the record, the fact is that these are worrying times for towns and constituencies with a large manufacturing base.

In a recent Adjournment debate on textiles and the clothing industry, I raised several matters of concern. There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to satisfy workers or managers. Only today I received a letter from the British Clothing Industry Association Ltd., the British Textile Confederation, and the Knitting Industries Federation, which reiterates what I have said. The letter states:

> "But we now share a growing apprehension about the level of activity over the coming months and beyond. On the export front, where we have had considerable success, the strengthening of sterling has made it difficult to maintain the pace of advance. At home, the effect of higher interest rates is likely to depress consumer and retail demand. The weak United States dollar has materially increased the competitiveness of imports, particularly from those countries in the Far East whose currencies are linked to the dollar, and this has had a twofold impact: pressure on the market place, and pressure on prices and margins, reflected in some areas of the textile industry by short-time working, closures and redundancies. There is concern about future orders across a growing area of our joint industries."

I reiterate that there is nothing in the Queen's Speech to reassure people. There is no promise to come clean on the real level of unemployment so that regions such as mine can qualify for EEC grants. It has continuously annoyed me that our unemployment figures are fiddled. That is to the detriment of areas such as mine when they apply for grants. Halifax is like the hole in the middle of the doughnut. Firms move out and relocate where they can get EEC grants.

The industries that I have mentioned have fought back hard since the 1980s, when the Government's disastrous policies threw them into recession. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) is present. She quite rightly referred to the Government's policies as Mappa Mundi. The south-east figures largely in the Government's policies, and the rest of us must manage with breadcrumbs.

We read in the Gracious Speech that yet another Bill is to be brought forward—they now total about 50—for the destruction of local government. Yet again, housing is to be on the agenda. When future generations study the Tory Government's record over the past decade, they will quite rightly wonder how a Government who are so blessed with wealth from North sea oil, and with Treasury coffers full of money that was stolen by selling off public assets—the Government have been selling Britain by the pound, and they intend to continue to do so—could preside over such shameful levels of homelessness and real unemployment.

The Gracious Speech refers also to the conduct of local authorities. Having been a local councillor, I felt a chill on hearing that ominous phrase. I wonder whether Bradford is a threat to the rest of us.

On the subject of Bradford, I congratulate the elderly woman who, today, successfully obtained a judicial review. The case against the council that is trying to sell the home in which she is a resident will be heard in the High Court. What kind of people think that it is good to sell off a residential home with people in it? What kind of thinking goes into such a dehumanising process? The people involved are not even allowed the dignity of remaining with their landlord—the local authority. They are to be parcelled and sold off like baggage.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is not present. Recently, in the press and other media, he has been articulate in advocating care of the elderly in the community. I welcome him to the side of the angels. Opposition Members have been saying that for decades. We are genuine in our demand for decent community care for the elderly, but we want an intensive care package across the whole spectrum, and that includes the National Health Service. Why on earth can there no longer be a long-stay bed for an elderly person? Why is there a cut-off point for NHS beds for elderly people? I include local government and the voluntary sector, all of which are experts in such care. The Government have shut down NHS long-stay beds for the elderly.

My local health authority and the hospital in which I worked for 10 years tell us that there are no waiting lists for the care of the elderly. That is absolute nonsense. If we never put anybody on a waiting list, of course there are no waiting lists. It is as easy as that. We want an intensive care package. For years we have argued that to hand over money to the private sector to care for the elderly in residential accommodation, when they have not been assessed by medical practitioners or by the social services for a place in certain accommodation, hurts the elderly, because they do not have access to real rehabilitation or reorientation with a view to going back into the community, and they are simply used as a means to earn money for private individuals. That harms the elderly, it is wrong, and it is economic nonsense for the taxpayer.

It is expensive to care for the elderly. For a long time private homes have benefited by the Government cutting services for the elderly, particularly for those in residential care. It has not been the right kind of care. It is not as good as that which can be given by fully trained staff and people who have expertise. Recently, the Audit Commission rightly pointed out that billions of pounds have been wasted.

Mr. Holt: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Mahon: No, I shall not give way. I wish to finish my point about the elderly.

The elderly were subjected to a great deal of stress and anxiety during the past couple of weeks when the Chancellor of the Exchequer was flying a kite about targeting the benefits that are enjoyed by pensioners. I could give the Chancellor many good reasons for having universal benefits, and millions of pensioners could also do so. Universal benefits are cheaper to administer. As Conservative Members claim to be interested in cheap administration, I should have thought that they would be convinced by the facts that the Government's surveys have shown. Universal benefits have almost 100 per cent. take-up. That is important. What is better than a 100 per cent. take-up?

Means-tested benefits create poverty traps, but I emphasise that the main point about universal benefits is that they do not stigmatise. If people persist in arguing that the well-off will benefit, the answer is quite simple —take it back at the other end in taxes. Our elderly people have been through two world wars and have worked or been unemployed through the depression. They could teach us a great deal. Do not subject them to stress and anxiety. We must not even consider subjecting them to the stigmatised means test that we had before the war.

I was interested in the article in *The Independent* yesterday, by Peter Kellner, about universal benefits. I recommend that it be read by Conservative Members and, if I had anything to do with it, I would make it compulsory. Mr. Kellner says:

> "So far, however, ministers have only been playing in the foothills of this particular mountain range. Universal benefits, like universal public services, are part of what makes a wealthy society civilised. Moreover, despite claims to the contrary, their overall impact is redistributive in the right direction. Greater selectivity sounds like a sensible idea, but the greatest gainers from such a policy would not be the needy; they would be the fit, childless rich."

Mr. Holt: The hon. Lady referred to private nursing homes and the National Health Service. What advice would she give to Mr. Richard Dennis, who is branch secretary of COHSE in north Teesside, and who owns his own private nursing home which is run mainly by people from the DHSS?

Mrs. Mahon: I would give exactly the same advice as I would give to anybody who believes that it is all right to care for old people and make a profit from it. I do not believe that a civilised society should go down that road. Elderly people should be cared for with dignity and with the best possible care from the state.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Mahon: No. I want to move on. I have given way on the point.

The Gracious Speech says that the Government will take action to raise standards throughout education. On the Government's record, I would challenge that. The Tory reality of recent years has been to destroy the chance of higher education to any youngster from a working-class background. For proof, we need only look at the cuts in student grants, at the cuts in benefits for working-class students, who are struggling at university, and the recent proposal that student loans will be all that will be on offer. Higher education will become university for the rich and compulsory YTS for the remainder. I must say, too, that nothing in the Gracious Speech convinces me that the YTS is a credible training scheme for the vast majority of youngsters.

In this morning's post I received a survey from the Economic and Social Research Council entitled "Jobs for Young People—A Picture of Diminishing Opportunity". Its conclusions were:

> "Increasing numbers of young people aged 16-17 are entering the job market without the skills and qualifications that employers now require. As a consequence, Britain is rapidly developing a fundamental mismatch between the skills supplied by young people and those demanded by employers. The Youth Training Scheme has failed to redress this mismatch, and has in some ways perpetuated it."

The report continues:

> "The research argues that realistic job prospects for young people continue to look bleak. It goes on to suggest that for as long as training schemes such as YTS encourage early school leaving and fail to provide young people with the skills and qualifications now demanded by employers, these prospects can only worsen. The research concludes that a policy to encourage greater youth participation in higher education is urgently required in order to meet employers' demands for a more highly qualified young work force and stem an increase in the proportion of young people who are long term unemployed and, potentially unemployable."

I repeat that I believe that a vast majority of the YTS schemes have not fulfilled the Government's claims. This important piece of research will be discussed over and over again in the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) outlined an alternative Gracious Speech that would benefit women. My hon. Friend made a remarkable speech, and I am only sorry that the House was not full at the time.

The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) appeared to me and my hon. Friends to be operating in some kind of time warp. He praised the Prime Minister, I believe, in the context of the Prime Minister being a woman. I point out that nothing in the Gracious Speech will do much to help the vast majority of women in my constituency. I highlight the position of one section of the work force that I met recently—home workers. I listened as the workers, mainly women, told me that they earned as little as 20p an hour in the enterprise culture that the Prime Minister and her Government have created. They are being paid Third-world rates and their plight is the ultimate in exploitation. I dread the next 12 months and their effect on the vast majority of women. In the past year we have seen cuts to the NHS, to local government and to education—all of which hurt women.

Selling off the water and electricity industries is a shameful proposition which will be fought tooth and nail by the Labour party. Water belongs to all of us and it is not the Government's to sell off to anyone. It is life-saving and desperately necessary to us all. Conservative Members should note that, if and when profits take precedence over producing a safe water supply, history shows that disease ignores boundaries. Cholera killed those on top of the hill, just as it killed those at the bottom. For that reason, those who owned the wealth in the 19th century wanted a public water supply.

To sell off the electricity supply industry is an act of criminal folly. A couple of weeks ago I sat here and listened to an excellent debate on the disposal of nuclear waste. Hon. Members from both sides of the House, apart from the new junior Environment Minister, agreed that the current proposals for the land disposal of radioactive waste were lacking in scientific and technical justification and had more to do with political decisions.

On Sunday, *The Observer* gave us an insight into the cost of disposal, which gave the game away. That article talked about burying high-level waste, which is a

[Mrs. Mahon]

frightening thought. As I understood it from the debate, we had not yet come to a decision on that dreadful and dangerous proposition. If such a decision has been made, we are entitled to know where that waste will be buried. No doubt the NIMBY—not-in-my-back-yard—and NIMTOO—not-in-my-term-of-office—arguments will be deployed. Who will pay for its burial, and what guarantees will be given once the nuclear industry is owned by the French, the Germans or the Libyans?

Will YTS trainees oversee the vitrification of high-level waste? Will those who have been forced on to employment training schemes be found driving the waste up and down the country? We deserve, and we shall demand, answers. I do not believe that the Government have any coherent policy for the disposal of nuclear waste. Previous Governments have accepted responsibility for the waste, but this Government do not appreciate that the deadly waste is with us for thousands of years. It is the utmost folly to continue to produce it.

I am pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Health is here guarding the pot. I was an auxiliary nurse for 10 years and I have had some experience in the NHS. I had a super job caring for the elderly and those with mental illness. I have a great deal of expertise in recognising that illness in those who are unaware that they are suffering from it.

Many of my colleagues were enrolled nurses, staff nurses, midwives, sisters, domestics and porters. They represented the full range of health care workers and were all decent and hard-working citizens. The Secretary of State for Health—I am sorry that he is not here—greatly insults them with his arrogance and his contempt for their grievances about the imposed, stupid regrading scheme. It will not wash. The nurses will fight back. They expect and deserve better treatment.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Mahon: No, I shall not.

I should never have believed that so much damage could be done by so few to such a brilliant service. The Government have deliberately starved the National Health Service. They have deliberately created a situation where children and babies on waiting lists die. They have decided that there will be no long-stay beds for the elderly, whatever the illness or suffering. History will judge the Government, and the people will turn them out of office.

Before that day comes, we shall fight the Government. I am not intimidated by the odds, and nor are my hon. Friends. I come from a proud stock of people who created the wealth of this country. My mother was a textile worker and my father was a bus mechanic and a bus driver. They taught me the true values of Socialism and of caring for each other. Their skills and courage were shown through two world wars, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said. We are a proud people. We recognise the enemy that we are up against. We certainly recognise the damage contained in the Queen's Speech. I owe it to those who went before me to fight those dreadful proposals, and I promise the House that I shall.

9.11 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): It has long been my ambition to cheer up the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon). My previous attempt was rather unsuccessful. I came across a piece written about a moving speech that she had made, in which she was highly praised, and I brought it to her attention. Unfortunately, I discovered that that piece was in a paper published by Mr. Rupert Murdoch, so she was not allowed to read it. Perhaps I shall have better luck——

Mrs. Mahon *rose*——

Sir Anthony Meyer: If the hon. Lady will contain herself and be patient, I have better news for her. I may be more successful this time, because I shall follow her part of the way down the road to advocating the advantages of universal benefits. Who knows?—this may be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

I should like to speak on a subject that will loom very large in the Government's programme as foreshadowed by the Gracious Speech as they press on with the reforms of social security. That subject is the relative effectiveness of universal as opposed to means-tested benefits for ensuring a decent standard of living for pensioners, the sick, the disabled and low-income families with small children. I can begin even-handedly, by delivering a slap in the face to both the serious political parties.

To listen to the efforts by the Labour party to exploit the Chancellor of the Exchequer's thinking aloud on the theme of means testing is a weird experience. After all, it is supposed to be the party that wants to help the poor. When a senior Minister produces some ideas, however ill presented, for doing so more effectively, the Labour party's first and only concern is to grab as much short-term political advantage as it can get.

As for the Government, they are for ever telling us how pensioners are so much better off than they have ever been. Statistically, I have no doubt that that is true, but it is not the impression that many of us get when we meet some of the pensioners in our constituencies. All the time, we run into elderly people who are having a real struggle to make ends meet and who can do so only by going without most of the things that make life worth living. But there are also many pensioners, thank goodness, who are doing very nicely indeed, as they deserve to.

Hundreds and thousands of pensioners have one, sometimes two, pensions on top of the state pension. They have savings that yield an investment income. There is much talk about the disadvantages of higher interest rates, but one should bear it in mind that for those who have savings, higher interest rates mean a higher income. Above all, those people are now the unencumbered owners of their homes, having paid off their mortgages. In short, they are basking in well-deserved prosperity. So numerous and prosperous are they that they are unwittingly inflicting a real injustice on a smaller, although substantial, number of their fellow pensioners. They are boosting the average income of pensioners to a high point.

The Government are able to boast that pensioners' incomes increased by 23 per cent. between 1979 and 1986 —a rise twice as swift as that of the population as a whole —and that their real incomes from savings and occupational pensions rose by no less than 59 per cent. What is more, they can and do make a further claim for the pensioners at the other end of the scale. We are told that the real income of the poorest pensioners has increased by 20 per cent. in real terms during the same seven-year period. I rejoice to hear that. It bears out my own observations. I find little evidence of grinding poverty among my poorest pensioners.

However, there will always be a few who slip through the safety net, and I met such a couple the other day. He is a cancer patient and is unable to work; she has to look after him. They are below retirement age. They have no income but have paid off their mortgage. The sum they are expected to live on by way of income support is £52. I do not see how they can live on that. They could sell or mortgage their house and live off the proceeds, but if they did that, they would lose their income support, would have no reserves for emergencies and would lose what is left of their self-respect.

I digress; the point I want to make is that, with a few exceptions, the poorest have been well protected. The better-off are better off than ever before and the average is therefore high. Somewhere in the middle is a substantial group which is doing rather badly. The income and level of savings of people in that group have left them above the base line for any means test. For the most part, those people are Tory voters. The Labour party is not really interested in them, and the Government are rather smug about them. The Government can always claim—I always claim this when anyone complains to me—that they were far worse off under Labour and will be far worse off again. That is true, but it is not good enough.

To charge the Government with robbing the poor to pay the rich is the sort of silliness we expect from the Labour party. The true charge is that they have helped the very poor partly at the expense of the rather poor. The rather poor include a large number of pensioners and others who live by the values that the Government like to preach. Many of them have small savings or a tiny struggling business and prefer to take low-paid jobs than to be a little better off on state benefits. A nasty feeling is growing that the Government do not care as much for those people as they might, considering that the majority are or were Tory voters and that many of them are Tory party workers.

For such people, the surest, although not the cheapest, way of bringing much-needed help is by a straight increase in non-means-tested benefits such as retirement pensions for the elderly and child benefit for families. Ministers mutter about scattering grapeshot, and we hear a lot about duchesses using their benefit for some frivolous purchase or other. However, the retirement pension is taxable and child benefit could be made taxable. It is not seemly for a Government who have slashed taxes at the top end to complain that the tax system is no longer an effective method of taking benefit from those who do not need it.

One of the Government's and the Prime Minister's most uncritical admirers has been Mr. Ronald Butt, who writes regularly in *The Times*. If I were a Minister, particularly the Prime Minister, I would be troubled to read what Mr. Butt wrote in *The Times* on 10 November:

> "By its recent actions and by other clues to its thinking, the Government is supplying material that its opponents will produce at the next election as evidence supporting their main charge against Mrs. Thatcher. This is that, . . . the Government has little instinctive concern for a broader concept of social justice embracing those who have a comparatively hard time in a relatively undramatic way."

Later in the article, he says:

> "Nor is it a help to point to the 'well-off' pensioners who own their own houses which they have to live in with a relatively small disposable income. All that does is to incur the suspicion that while the tax cuts given to encourage the enterprise of the very rich are sacrosanct, when it comes to finding money for those in real need, the cash may have to be found from those in the category just above the really poor."

That is a worrying quotation. The Government claim with some justification that they have made some progress in eliminating the poverty trap, whereby someone who manages to earn a bit more will end up with rather less. They have managed to juggle the figures, at any rate for those able to work, so as vastly to reduce the "why work?" syndrome. They cannot honestly claim to have achieved as much for the pensioners, the disabled and those who care for sick relatives. All those people are caught in a poverty trap that is getting steadily deeper, often as a direct, although unintended, result of the Government's efforts to get more help to those who need it most.

The list of benefits available to those who can give proof of low income seems to get longer by the month. There are means tests for income support, housing benefit, dental and optical treatment and now, unhappily, dental and optical tests. There are means tests for prescriptions, for hospital travel costs, for nursing home fees, for funeral payments, for help with fuel costs and with insulating and draught proofing costs, for legal aid and for rates relief.

I accept that this tangle of means-tested benefits results from attempts by successive Governments to target help where it is most needed, but all too often the target is being missed. The multiplicity of these benefits means that only those who are sharp or exceptionally well advised get all the benefits to which they are entitled. For that reason, the take-up rate is much lower than it should be, and for some benefits it is unacceptably low.

I welcome the Minister's announced intention to launch a campaign to improve take-up, but perhaps it would be better to spend the money on improving and simplifying benefits. Much of the trouble stems from the announcement by the then Secretary of State for Social Services, now the Secretary of State for Employment, at the Conservative party conference in 1985 that he and his fellow Ministers in the Department would during the next six months carry out what he described as

> "the most comprehensive review of the social security system since Beveridge."

The very idea that three busy Ministers in their spare time from dealing with the day-to-day business of their Department and their constituency and other engagements could match the monumental achievement of Sir William Beveridge for several years during the war boggled the mind. Nevertheless, they did a surprisingly good job. The Social Security Act 1986, the end result of their labours, is about 80 per cent. good. But 80 per cent. good is not good enough, partly because the Ministers did not have enough time or commitment to follow through all the implications of the changes that they made.

But there was another much more fundamental reason. The remit of their inquiry did not include the tax system or social security contributions. It is no earthly use even attempting to reform the social security system without an equally basic review of the impact of contributions to national insurance, and of the impact of taxation, not only on those on low incomes but on those who pay no tax at all.

Until the Government show readiness to tackle these components of the problem, they are not serious when

[Sir Anthony Meyer]

they talk about targeting benefits. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) made a gaping hole below the water line of their professed intentions in this regard when, according to *The Independent* on 7 November, he said of the Government's intention to phase out child benefit because it was going to rich people who did not need it:

> "If higher rate taxpayers do not need £7·25 per child per week child benefit, they don't need the £30 a week they get in married man's tax allowance. Still less, if they are mortgagors, do they need the £28 a week they get in mortgage interest relief."

I believe that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is aware of these anomalies and that he regards them as morally indefensible. The trouble is that, even if they are morally indefensible, they are politically unassailable, as witness the sudden embarrassed silence that descends on the Labour party when anyone talks about the absurdity of mortgage interest relief. It is rather like the reaction if someone at a meeting to outlaw cruel sports were to suggest that fishing should be included.

The Gracious Speech should have contained an announcement that the Government, in their pursuit of the perennial will-o'-the-wisp of effective relief of poverty and distress—a will-o'-the -wisp that has eluded Governments not just for decades but for centuries—would initiate a comprehensive review of the social security system, benefits and contributions alike, and of the tax system, including all allowances and with particular reference to the very high marginal rates at the bottom of the scale, where, almost uniquely in western Europe, the taxpayer pays the full standard rate on the very first pound of taxable income.

Nor do I believe that this is a job that can be done by busy Ministers in their spare time, even if Treasury Ministers form part of the team, as they surely should. I believe that this is a matter for a Royal Commission, something that has become unfashionable. I do not know whether anyone has a memory long enough to recall what such a thing is, we have not had one for such a long time. This is the time, and this is the issue, for such a prestigious, wide-ranging inquiry. It may take two or three years, but better that than a botched job carried out in six months.

9.27 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): What worries me is that the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) may be one of a dying breed of Conservative Members who produce arguments in favour of universal benefit and child benefit that are critical of their party. The Gracious Speech shows that we are into a further stage of the policies that the Government have been pursuing ever since they emerged in 1979, and the policies that it sets out are in line with principles that are so different from those mentioned by the hon. Gentleman.

The Gracious Speech has not appeared in a vacuum. It follows legislation passed in the last Session. No legislation influences the shape of what we are now getting more than that concerning the poll tax. I shall refer briefly to the poll tax to establish certain principles, against which I shall examine the Gracious Speech. From 1 April next year, the poll tax will be a reality in Scotland, and registration for the poll tax will start in England and Wales. That means that the franchise will be cut, as has already happened in Scotland, because of the link between the poll tax register and the electoral register. For the first time since the extension of the universal franchise, people will be required to pay a tax to qualify to vote.

People's civil liberties will be invaded by the poll tax registrar in his search for people missing from the register. The central authority of the Secretary of State for the Environment, as with that of many other Secretaries of State in respect of other legislation introduced by the Government, will be greatly enhanced to enable him to control the legislation. Local government will become a sham because its powers will have been taken away, and that will be the end of local democracy. Above all, the poor will be asked to subsidise the rich. The poll tax will have a serious effect and we shall have poll-axed people who will be seeking to respond to the other measures introduced by the Government.

How will the franchise be affected by the measures in the Queen's Speech? People will become more disenchanted with the political process and will believe that politics have nothing to offer them. Those who still qualify to vote under the poll tax may turn away from the political system.

I stood for election in a constituency in whch there was a sharp divide between the areas of Conservative and Labour dominance. In Labour areas, there was great enthusiasm to get rid of the Government. I fear that those people who are incensed about what has occurred will, when blow after blow has been rained upon them, become apathetic and disappear from the electoral game. That might be in the Government's interests. A Member such as me might lose his seat, and that should worry Parliament considerably. Candidates may seek to represent both sections of society, but some people may feel cowed and may not wish to be represented by them. A Government who depend on the apathy of the public should be concerned about their position; and they are certainly not acting within the spirit and traditions of parliamentary democracy.

The Queen's Speech contains recommendations for further public expenditure cuts and hopes for further tax cuts. The rich, who have already received a considerable tax reduction from 60 per cent. to 40 per cent., may be able to look for even greater rewards in the future. Those rewards will be provided through taxes on public services and cuts in much needed provisions in working-class areas, such as Barrow hill, in my constituency, where few people have second pensions.

As a result of the proposals in the Queen's Speech on local government capital and housing finance, the poor will be asked to subsidise those poorer than themselves. As a result of the privatisation proposals, ordinary people will be asked to pay market prices for water and electricity. Those prices will be based upon the principles suggested by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) in a televised debate during which she said that a person in a desert would pay a fortune for a drink of water. Presumably a person caught in a blizzard would be prepared to pay a fortune for protection from the blizzard and for warmth. In other words, he would be prepared to pay a high price for electricity, or the highest that he could pay, to look after himself. In such instances individuals would pay what the market determined, and in many instances the market would break them.

The imposition of the poll tax will hit civil liberties, but other damaging measures are now proposed. It seems that a national membership scheme will be introduced for football followers. Football fans are to be dealt with on the same footing as terrorists in Northern Ireland. It seems that their actions are seen to be the same. Football fans are to be a race apart. They will carry passes, unlike opera fans and theatre goers who, presumably, are seen as proper people within our society. Some will not wish to carry passes. Presumably they will be told that they can watch all the football they want on television. That is rather like Marie Antoinette telling the people that they can eat cake. The issuing of passes is irrelevant to the circumstances of football fans, and the notion is based on ignorance of the life that they lead and the interests that they have.

Power has been taken centrally by the state, and we are to have more of that in the measures that the Government plan to introduce in this Session. There will be controls in addition to those that are contained in the Education Reform Act 1988. The Secretary of State for Education and Science will have powers to introduce teaching by rote despite education being the enlivening and extending of the intellect in helping individuals' minds to develop. Education is not about telling children to repeat ABCD as and when required or to produce answers to certain pre-determined questions.

The state will take more power unto itself in replacing section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911. That has been made clear already in the White Paper that has been discussed by the House.

With centralised power, local democracy will have more blows rained upon it when it is already a dying body. A Bill will be introduced to control the conduct of local authority business. The poor will have more taken from them, against all the norms of Western democracy. We could not get the welfare state without developing a democratic system in Britain, with similar developments in the Western world generally. The welfare system will not disappear, except by abuse of the democratic system itself. The Government were elected to office but they have not acted upon any democratic principles. They have not considered the views and values that exist in society. They have chosen not to defend democratic pluralism.

The Government are prepared to attack democracy by controlling public expenditure, attacking local government, privatising essential services, placing more pressures on the unemployed, messing around once more with the Health Service and introducing privatisation where and when they can. In addition, the Government promise through the Gracious Speech to interfere with the social security system.

The poor will begin to find that they are being pushed out of the political game. The Government's programme is an offence to democracy and adds to past abuses. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the measures that are proposed for Northern Ireland. Poverty, unemployment and chaos are more serious in Northern Ireland than in any other area administered from Westminster.

Where is the Government's proposed devolved assembly? Such an assembly would regularise the political scene in Northern Ireland. Where is a Bill of Rights, which would protect the citizens of Northern Ireland? Where are the measures to introduce and stimulate a decent economy in Northern Ireland to help to introduce full employment? Instead, we are offered a measure about fair employment. Fair employment will work in a fair weather system when full employment has been established in front of it. That is the action that must be taken. Northern Ireland can only be thankful that at least it does not yet have the poll tax to contend with.

9.39 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I welcome the proposals outlined in the Gracious Speech, as will many of my constituents. The state opening of Parliament was quite magnificent, but I trust that more and more hon. Members will realise that the concept of televising our proceedings is a great mistake. I understand that an experiment took place yesterday to test the lighting in the Chamber, and a silence has fallen over those people who witnessed it. I can only repeat that we would all regret the televising of our proceedings.

During the American elections, the Republicans accused the Democrats of being liberals. That charge struck a chord. Tonight I accuse Opposition Members of being conservative and reactionary. That was highlighted by the speech of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock). His was a sad and entirely negative speech, but of course, that is the theme of the Labour party today: it is bankrupt of ideas and believes that the general public will swallow the nonsense that the Labour party is the listening party. The Government decide what they believe is best for the country and do not consider short-term popularity. That is the best way to proceed.

I was pleased to note the commitment in the Gracious Speech that the Government will

> "continue to pursue firm financial policies designed to bear down on inflation."

Over the past few months, we have heard hypocrisy from the Socialists, who have performed a gigantic U-turn over Europe. We have also seen their hypocritical stance about inflation. We will never let them forget how high inflation was between 1974 and 1979. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) said that he came into the Conservative party during the 1970s as a result of that high inflation. I joined the party in the 1960s; I decided to become active in the Conservative party as a result of the Labour Government's mismanagement.

I am pleased that the Government are determined to continue their policies of sound financial management. Basildon is experiencing an economic boom. When I became the Member for Basildon five years ago, nearly 10,000 people were unemployed in the constituency. There has been a reduction of more than 50 per cent., and now fewer than 3,000 people are registered as unemployed.

Business is booming in Basildon. More and more firms are coming to the town and I am delighted that Basildon has become the most successful new town in the country as a result of the Government's policies. Basildon is a beacon for the south.

I was also pleased to note the references in the Gracious Speech to Mr. Gorbachev's visit. Earlier this year, I visited Moscow under the auspices of Christian Solidarity International. Our task, together with an American Congressman who led a party, was to try to obtain the release of a number of prisoners of conscience. We took the list given to us by Keston college of over 100 prisoners of conscience. I applaud the way in which the Soviet authorities have reacted.

Only last week I met Konstantin Charchev, chairman of the Soviet Union's Council for Religious Affairs, and congratulated him on the announcements made over the past few weeks and months about prisoners of conscience.

[Mr. David Amess]

However, I also raised with him the fact that our delegation was not entirely happy about the circumstances of Vasili and Galina Barats. We still need further assurances about their circumstances. When we visited Galina Barats in the Soviet Union, she was confined to the 18th storey of a tower block under house arrest and food had to be lifted up the side of the tower block in a bucket. We were not satisfied with the assurances that we were given on that.

I am sure that the Government are sensible to be cautious in their approach to glasnost and perestroika. We applaud everything that Mr. Gorbachev is trying to do in the Soviet Union, but his position is not entirely secure, and the sensible thing is to proceed cautiously.

I welcome the proposal in the Gracious Speech for a national membership scheme to control admission to football matches. I never thought that the deplorable incidents that took place during a football match this weekend would happen in my lifetime. We should take note of the scheme that has been implemented for the past two years by the chairman of Luton football club, my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans). In the two years that that scheme has been operational in Luton, there has not been one arrest. Hon. Members might object to certain parts of the scheme, but I am sure that such objections can be ironed out.

Mr. Graham Bright (Luton, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that, not only have there been no arrests in Luton in the past two years, but the whole atmosphere of the town has been changed? Shoppers can now go freely about their business when Luton is playing at home. The scheme has not only reduced violence but has transformed the environment of an area with a football club in its vicinity.

Mr. Amess: My hon. Friend represents a Luton constituency and is well placed to give us an informed opinion on how that membership scheme is working. As a House, we should fail in our duty if we did not try the scheme to see whether it has any effect on the violence at our football grounds.

I also welcome the proposals in the Gracious Speech to continue to raise standards in education. In my constituency of Basildon, standards in education are improving all the time. I was honoured to be invited to a prize-giving ceremony last week at the largest comprehensive school in Basildon, where I gave out the first GCSE examination certificates to those young people. The parents and the teachers were proud, and above all the young people to whom I was giving those certificates were delighted with their achievements. GCSE has been a success in Basildon and it has been a success throughout Britain. Therefore, I applaud the Government's commitment, as outlined in the Gracious Speech, to continue to improve education in Britain.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Just to underline what my hon. Friend has said, is he aware that I had the privilege yesterday of visiting a comprehensive school in Kirton in Lindsey in my constituency and the first thing that the headmaster said to me was how the Labour-controlled education authority's attitude had changed? Once upon a time, he had received diktats from the county education authority on all sorts of nonsense, such as not wearing uniforms, and so on. Today, the education authority is so concerned that schools might be on the point of opting out that it is bending over backwards trying to ensure that it can persuade the headmaster in this case that the authority can give him everything that he wants. That is a benefit of the legislation now on the statute book.

Mr. Amess: My hon. Friend tempts me to remark on the Labour party's intention to be unco-operative towards those schools that opt out. However, I thank him for his comments.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The comments of the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) have nothing to do with the Queen's Speech, which contains no reference to schools opting out. I have sat here patiently for six hours without being called, and what is occurring on the Government Benches is a conspiracy against free speech.

Mr. Speaker: The debate on the Loyal Address is traditionally a wide one, but I remind right hon. and hon. Members that they must not stray too far.

Mr. Amess: I refer to that part of the Queen's Speech dealing with child law. I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health on the Front Bench. All right hon. and hon. Members will welcome the Government's commitment to reform child law. It is a sensitive area, and I know that the proposals brought before Parliament will strike a balance between the interests of the child and those of the family. All right hon. and hon. Members will have been presented with sensitive cases with which they have had to deal. The proposed legislation is long overdue and I hope that there will be all-party co-operation to ensure that the legislation ending up on the statute book is in the best interests of all those children coming before the courts. Such legislation is even more necessary in the light of Cleveland.

I must tell my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Heath that I am disappointed that there is no mention in the Queen's Speech of any intention to legislate for embryo research. The Warnock report was published about six years ago.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Edwina Currie): It was published in 1984.

Mr. Amess: My hon. Friend reminds me of the correct date of publication.

Many right hon. and hon. Members feel that time should be given to tackling the problems surrounding embryo research. Although I applaud everything that scientists in this country are doing, I am not satisifed that, in their eagerness to push barriers forward, they are not doing things about which people such as myself, holding strong views about the matter, are not entirely happy. I hope that the Government will tackle that subject.

As to abortion, there were 174,000——

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Like the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey), I and my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) have been sitting here patiently for a number of hours. It is one thing listening to Conservative Members speaking about matters to which the Queen's Speech may refer, but it is another listening to them addressing subjects that are not included and eating up the time of the House, so that Opposition Members cannot make valid contributions. That goes beyond the bounds of good conduct.

Mr. Speaker: It has traditionally been the case that the first day's debate on the Loyal Address has always been wide and not tied to any specific subject. There are no wind-up speeches tonight, and it has always been legitimate, particularly on the first day, to draw attention to matters that right hon. and hon. Members feel should be in the Gracious Speech.

Mr. McCartney: Will you, Mr. Speaker, give Opposition Members an assurance that those of us who have been sitting here for six hours will be given an early opportunity tomorrow to catch your eye or that of the Deputy Speaker, so that they may make their contributions?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows, because he has often heard me say it, that those right hon. and hon. Members who sit patiently through a two-day debate—and this is a five-day debate—have a much better chance of being called on succeeding days.

Mr. Amess: The House will know that I was referring specifically to the part of the Gracious Speech that states:

> "Other measures will be laid before you."

I was perhaps anticipating that, if my speech was persuasive, further measures might be announced.

The reference in the Gracious Speech to the National Health Service is another reason for me to be pleased that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health is on the Front Bench. She will know what an excellent job Basildon hospital is doing, and what superb health care it is providing throughout the district. The Health and Medicines Bill—I had the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee—has been taken up willingly by Basildon and Thurrock district health authority, and my hon. Friend will be glad to know that the authority has already won a number of contracts to provide occupational health care for Essex police, GEC Avionics and any number of others.

Car parking is being charged for, which so far has brought in revenue of——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that local issues are a little wide of the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Amess: I welcome the Government's commitment to continued improvement in health care provision, on which they embarked last year.

I am delighted that the Government are to introduce legislation to stop local authorities being extravagant and getting people into debt. There is no worse example of debt burden than can be seen in Basildon. Year after year, the council has spent money that it does not have. It is the only local authority to have built a brand new theatre costing £11 million. Of course, we have not the money to pay for it, and through creative accounting, the authority has presented the books in such a way that Basildon's ratepayers will be in debt for a considerable time.

I am also very concerned about the handover of Commission for the New Towns property, as the Local Government Bill will enable local authorities to compete on an equal financial footing with housing associations. The House will understand why my constituents and I were outraged to learn from a press release that the local authority clearly will not co-operate with the legislation:

> "Basildon Council will not co-operate with housing associations, trusts or private landlords trying to take over Commission for New Towns homes. That was the message from last week's full Council as members voted to reaffirm the district authority's opposition to any transfer of Basildon's 15,000 CNT properties against the wishes of tenants."

Basildon is supposed to be a hung council, but it is not a hung council at all. It is an amalgamation of Socialists who are not prepared to come out——

Mr. McCartney: On a point of order. Mr. Speaker. I do not intend to cause any further problems, but the matters raised by the hon. Gentleman were dealt with over the past 12 months in the debates on the Housing Bill, soon to become an Act. Everything that the hon. Gentleman has said in the last five minutes is covered by that legislation, so what he is saying is not relevant to this debate.

Mr. Speaker: I heard the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) say that he was drawing attention to those elements of the Queen's Speech concerned with local government.

Mr. Amess: My constituents know that we must legislate this year to enable them to compete on an equal financial footing.

The local authority has wasted further money in staging a firework display. Only about 20 local residents turned up to discuss the authority's proposals, but coachloads of outsiders were brought in to see the taxpayers' money go up in smoke.

In conclusion, the American public has recently "won one for the Gipper". We are proud in this country that we have the greatest Prime Minister since the war and the greatest world statesman. We can be proud of the proposals in the Queen's Speech.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Physiological Measurement Technicians

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

10 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): The matter that I wish to raise this evening is important to many people who work in the National Health Service—the pay and conditions of physiological measurement technicians. There are several kinds of these technicians—for example, those who work in audiology, those who work in neurology and those who work in cardiology. Although what I have to say tonight applies to all those specialties, I shall concentrate on those who are engaged in cardiology. Therefore, I shall refer to them as cardiac technicians for the sake of clarity.

For the most part, cardiac technicians are part of the resuscitation teams in many hospitals. They play a crucial role in establishing a good quality ECG rhythm and constantly update doctors on many ECG changes. There have been many advances in technology in recent years that have greatly enhanced cardiology investigations. Consequently, the technicians must be trained and skilled professionals.

In addition to registering my concern about their pay and conditions, I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), to explain the Government's policy on recruitment and retention. I refer, first, to the pay and conditions of cardiac technicians. Their pay is determined by the appropriate Whitley council. For largely historical reasons, the technicians do not have their pay considered by an independent review body, as do, for example, radiographers. Therefore, cardiac technicians are locked into a situation where their annual pay increase is determined by the Whitley council and they have little, if any, prospect of material improvement. I hope to demonstrate that that is an unjust state of affairs and that it should be remedied. Cardiac technicians should be transferred to the professions allied to medicine so that their pay and conditions can in future be considered by an independent review body.

Apart from the historical reasons, it has been argued that cardiac technicians are different from, for example, radiographers and nurses, because they do not have the so-called "hands-on" responsibility for dealing with patients. As a result, cardiac technicians earn between £5,977 and £7,650 after two years' training. A senior cardiac technician earns between £7,383 and £9,250 after five years' experience. A chief technician earns between £9,479 and £11,824 after seven years. A comparatively small number of senior chief cardiac technicians earn between £11,425 and £13,345.

Those modest rates of pay compare poorly with people such as radiographers, physiotherapists and dieticians, whose pay and conditions are determined by the pay review body. A radiographer, for example, with three years' experience, earns between £8,000 and £9,150 compared with a cardiac technician earning between £5,977 and £7,650. A senior radiographer with five years' experience earns between £9,500 and £11,390, compared with only £7,383 to £9,250 for a cardiac technician. Moreover, a radiographer, physiotherapist or dietician can rise to a salary of between £15,605 and £17,225 for a super grade I, whereas that level is not open to cardiac technicians.

Then there are nurses, who, following the recent upgrading exercise, had a considerable pay increase. I shall only compare nurses with five years' experience—that is to say, a nurse who would be an SRN staff nurse on grade E, who would earn between £9,200 and £10,650, compared with a senior cardiac technician earning only between £7,383 and £9,250.

I particularly wish to direct my hon. Friend's attention to the comparison between cardiac technicians and radiographers. I stress that cardiac technicians have as much hands-on experience as radiographers. A cardiac technician working in, say, the intensive care unit of a large hospital, such as Harefield hospital in my constituency, has the responsible job of setting up cardiac pacing equipment for patients and operating the balloon pump. Technicians are directly involved in permanent pacemaker implants. They are engaged in invasive theatre work. For example, they provide ECGs, and they undertake pressure monitoring and pace-maker backup. Although radiographers get points that are considered by their review body when determining their pay awards and conditions, cardiac technicians do not, nor are they subject to the pay review procedure.

A cardiac technician works with patients and wears a lead apron. However, a radiographer sits behind a screen, where he or she is protected from radiography. In operating theatres, technicians are directly involved with the post-heart transplant patients having cardiac catheterisation and angiography. Once again, technicians are inside the theatre and wear lead aprons, whereas radiographers work outside behind a protective screen. Cardiac technicians are responsible for operating such sophisticated equipment as the scanner, for example, which uses the echo cardiograph and doppler techniques, both vital pieces of equipment in the diagnosis of heart abnormalities.

My hon. Friend the Minister may be interested to know that I recently visited Harefield hospital and, for half a day, watched technicians doing their work and testing pacemakers. I was impressed by the fact that they are responsible for doing that work. There is no doctor standing beside them, overseeing what they do. They are trained to find faults in pacemakers, and they alone are responsible for dealing with transplant patients in a truly hands-on way. I emphasise that only technicians see electrocardiograms to detect the problem of heart rejection. They also interpret results and report directly to consultants. Technicians actually control the follow-up in both procedures and decide how frequently to do an ECG. What could be more responsible? What could be more hands-on? How then can cardiac technicians be regarded as anything but members of a profession that is allied to medicine?

As my hon. Friend knows, a patient with a pacemaker receives a programme of exercise. It involves the checking and adjusting of parameters to obtain the most favourable amount of exercise that can be tolerated. The majority of patients who undergo that treatment are tested for angina. The exercise in which the patient is involved is potentially hazardous. However, only cardiac technicians are in attendance. Again, that demonstrates the high regard in which they are held. They are not accompanied by a doctor. In fact, a doctor plays no active role unless, for example, a cardiac arrest occurs. However, the technicians have direct responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the patient until the doctor takes over.

Does my hon. Friend know whether the Whitley council has ever visited a hospital, such as Hillingdon or Harefield, to see what the cardiac technicians actually do? I suspect that it has not visited such hospitals.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Edwina Currie) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Shersby: My hon. Friend is nodding. If the council has, it has kept a pretty low profile. If it had visited such a hospital and made the kind of investigation that I have made, I cannot believe that it would have recommended the miserable salaries that those extremely skilled and valuable people are being paid.

Another of the technicians' responsibilities is to train other cardiac technicians, including nurses, radiographers and other groups. That is all part of the learning process. It is also time-consuming and requires additional skills.

I want to make the point, too, that the technicians respond to demands in the night and at weekends when they frequently work on their own in the hospital dealing with patients who have undergone major surgery.

I hope that I have convinced my hon. Friend that a serious injustice exists because those technicians are excluded from the review body which considers the pay and conditions of professions allied to medicine. I hope that my hon. Friend will make it her business to ensure that that situation is remedied. I know that the cardiac technicians are not alone. There are others, such as audio technicians, whose position also should be carefully considered to see whether they should come under the auspices of the professions allied to medicine pay review body rather than the Whitley council.

I have raised the question of training in correspondence both with my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton), when he was Minister for Health, and more recently with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. In a letter to me dated 16 August, my hon. Friend, commenting on the recruitment and retention of physiological measurement technicians, made the point that, in answer to a parliamentary question in which I had referred to the difficulty of recruiting and retaining student technicians, the then Minister had said that he was not aware of difficulties.

I must tell my hon. Friend that, following an overview of the present situation, carried out in August by the acting director of personnel of the North West Thames regional health authority, it was concluded that, while the recruitment and retention problem is not at present universal, the situation is worsening. In North West Thames the vacancy rate at basic grade has risen by 50 per cent. since 1985. The overall vacancy rate across the region is currently 21 per cent. Therefore, my hon. Friend may conclude from those figures that the situation is not quite as cosy as our right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree thought it was, and as she thought it was when she replied to me in August.

In his report, the acting director of personnel came to the conclusion that several key points must be considered. First, although there is a widespread increase in the work load and development of cardiology services at district level, there is little increase in the number of technicians employed. Secondly, responsible departments do not take on students, as time is not available for effective training. A qualified work force, therefore, is not being developed within the region. I suspect that this situation applies throughout the country.

It is unlikely in North West Thames—considering present salary scales and accommodation costs in the south east—that basic grade technicians can be recruited from outside. Consequently, in order to provide a service, departments must employ local agency technicians. This, of course, is an expensive exercise, about which my hon. Friend must be concerned. For example, for a 37·5-hour week, a basic grade technician working in the National Health Service is paid £166·88, whereas a locum agency technician is paid £202·13.

I have mentioned these matters in the hope that, when my hon. Friend replies, she will say what her policy is towards the training and recruitment of such valuable people. I have spent a great deal of time with them and seen them working in the hospitals. I cannot honestly see any difference between the kind of work that they do and that of radiographers who have their pay determined by a review body.

This is an important matter and it is right to raise it in the House tonight. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to give me some words of encouragement and some hope of a change in the future.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Edwina Currie): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) on again winning the ballot. It is always a pleasure to debate with him as he is always well informed, courteous and persistent. He always checks his facts before he quotes them. I followed his speech carefully tonight, and he has all his facts just about right.

We have shared an Adjournment debate before on an aspect of work at Hillingdon. If I remember rightly, it was about the cost of agency staff who were causing some budget difficulties. My hon. Friend may recall that in 1982-83, when the Hillingdon health authority was created, the gross revenue expenditure was £46 million. This year, the cash allocation to that health authority is nearly £66 million, which represents a 10·5 per cent. increase in cash terms over the past year. In addition, we expect that it will spend £9 million on capital schemes and we hope that some of the money will be raised through land sales. Therefore, those sharp increases will show how seriously we take the points that have been made by my hon. Friend in his Adjournment debates. I hope that his constituents have found that the health service offered at Hillingdon is now responding better to their needs.

I am grateful for the fact that, earlier in the week, my hon. Friend set out some of the points that he wished to make. I regard that as a considerable courtesy, and a great help, as it assists me in making a much more considered reply.

My hon. Friend has raised an important topic for debate tonight, and I wish first to express the Government's appreciation of the work of the physiological measurement technicians working for the Health Service in all the specialties in support of our physicians, surgeons and other staff. They include those working in audiology, neurophysiology and, respiratory physiology,

[Mrs. Edwina Currie]

the perfusionists who support the heart-lung operations, and those working in cardiology, which is the specific subject of tonight's debate.

Ministers have never said that physiological measurement technicians—PMTs, if I may call them that—do not have hands-on responsibility for dealing with patients. Ministers have not, would not and could not say that, because it is obvious that most PMTs have hands-on responsibility. By the very nature of their work, patient contact is an essential feature of their job.

My hon. Friend is right that cardiology technicians must explain to patients what it is that they are to test and how they will position the equipment. They also reassure the patients on what is about to happen. If anything untoward should occur, it is the technicians who summon medical assistance—normally, doctors would not be present—and perhaps become part of a resuscitation effort, if required. I do not know how the rumour that Ministers said that PMTs do not have hands-on responsibility came about, but I am glad of the opportunity to refute it.

My hon. Friend has referred to the shortage of cardiology technicians in the North West Thames region. We are aware of reports of shortages in some areas, including North West Thames region, but presently it is not a nationwide problem. That was the point that I was trying to make in the correspondence that we had earlier in the year. Between 1979 and 1987 in England the number of PMTs has increased by more than 500—an increase of more than 30 per cent. For cardiology technicians, the increase is more than 7 per cent. It is obvious that some of the other groups have grown somewhat faster, perhaps because some of the specialties are newer or because developments have occurred in other specialties. However, that does not help my hon. Friend and his constituents.

I accept that there are shortages of a variety of NHS staff, particularly in London and the south-east. We have had numerous Adjournment debates on this topic, often far later in the night, as you well know, Mr. Speaker. The most recent Adjournment debate was about the Mid-Downs district health authority, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern).

In London and the south-east, the employment pressures are greatest and these affect wages, housing and the cost of living. It is even more difficult when there is sharp competition from employers in other hi-tech industries for the same sort of manpower that we need to recruit to become cardiology and other technicians. Therefore, we are very much in an area of active competition. By and large, we do reasonably well in those circumstances, but there are gaps, as my hon. Friend described.

The problem is faced by the Health Service and, indeed, by all the other employers in my hon. Friend's constituency, who are now bidding against each other for a finite work force. It will not get better as demography causes the number of school leavers to drop quickly, both now and in the next few years.

The solution that my hon. Friend suggested to the problems is to increase pay, and his specific remedy is to include the technicians in the pay review body system. I have corresponded with my hon. Friend about the criteria which were used when the review body arrangements for nurses and midwives and the professions allied to medicine were established. Indeed, I have had several opportunities to correspond with many colleagues on both sides of the House about those criteria.

The criteria were that first, each staff group, have an established tradition of not taking industrial action, often keeping services going in the face of such action by others; secondly, each group should essentially be involved in direct patient care; and thirdly, each group should, over a significant period, have been linked together for pay purposes. The important proviso then was that all the factors had to be satisfied—not just one or two, but all of them. It is clear that the PMTs did not and do not satisfy all of them, but they satisfy the point about direct patient care, which I dealt with. In saying that, I do not imply that PMTs or any other groups are not involved in patient care or have taken industrial action.

We also readily accept that the pay gap between review body groups and non-review body groups has widened in recent years. My hon. Friend mentioned certain groups, but he did not mention nurses. He might compare in equally favourable terms nurses' pay, particularly including the recent pay rise, with what some of the other groups are getting. What we cannot accept is that this is an argument for extending the coverage of review bodies to other groups.

Mr. Shersby: With respect to my hon. Friend, I made a comparison between cardiac technicians and nurses on grade E.

Mrs. Currie: I apologise to my hon. Friend, he did. My attention was distracted by one of the Labour Members who was leaving. As my hon. Friend will agree, as none of them is left, none will be able to hear the answer to the points that he raised.

As I have explained in the past to my hon. Friend, there have been attempts by other staff groups to join in the review body arrangements from which they were excluded at the outset. Those attempts were unsuccessful, and I have no reason to believe that they would be successful now. However, if the staff side representing the PMTs were formally to request inclusion in a review body, that request would be considered. I can tell the House that there has been no sign that the staff side intends to do so, as it has always been its contention that it prefers to continue within the collective bargaining system. That is a matter for the staff side and should it formally request inclusion in a review body, that would be considered.

If pay review bodies are not the answer, what are the alternatives? On pay, the main requirement is a need for more flexibility in our systems and for us to move towards some form of regional pay. We feel that that is the only way in which the differing problems about pay that affect the recruitment and retention of essential staff in various parts of the country can be resolved. We are already working towards that end.

We should also remember that pay is not the whole answer to the problem, although we accept that it is usually foremost in the minds of most people. Employers generally are not very good at pushing a total employment package in which pay is only one important part. For example, health authority employers do not always emphasise enough the advantages that we also offer through employment in the Health Service of an inflation-proofed pension, a generous holiday entitlement, sickness benefits and a secure, worthwhile and very interesting job. Local variations, such as flexible hours, part-time working and creches, which are beginning to appear, particularly in London, should also be included.

Much more effort needs to be put into retaining the staff that the National Health Service already has. Managers must manage better the career breaks, particularly of our women. They must also make certain that the skill mix is right so that tasks relate to the level and expertise of the staff concerned. Opportunities should also be taken to enable those without basic educational achievements to have the chance to do jobs that are denied them by current insurmountable entry requirements. In that sense, the technicians' work is attractive as they do not have the rigid, restrictive entry gates that some of the other professions have.

If recruitment and retention is a problem now in some parts of the country, we are afraid of how much worse it will be in a few years' time when the number of young people available for recruitment declines. We feel strongly —I think that my hon. Friend agrees—that attitudes must change.

While progress towards a system of regional pay is likely to be slow, in the meantime other initiatives are being pursued. A flexible pay and grading system for speech therapists is already in place. Medical laboratory scientific officers have recently accepted a similar proposal, and this will be implemented over the next few months. Negotiations are taking place with hospital pharmacists to see if they, too, would benefit from a scheme such as these. All these schemes are designed to improve career prospects and reward responsibility and expertise. They will not only make the jobs more attractive to new recruits, but we hope will encourage those already in the Health Service to stay there.

The current position on pay for physiological measurement technicians is negotiated, along with that of other technical staff groups, in committee E of the Professional and Technical B Whitley council. The staff side representing those staff recently accepted the management side's offer of an increase of 5·5 per cent. backdated to 1 April this year. Arrangements are in hand for the new rates to be paid as soon as possible. We hope that the new rate will be in the November salary payment, and the arrears in December. However, that depends on ensuring that we have everything on computer.

The management side has taken note of the staff side's complaint about pay and the effect on recruitment and retention. We are concerned about that, and the management side has recently conducted a national survey of staffing levels for all the staff groups in committee E. This has led to the setting up of a special working group to examine problems relating to the grade structure of several technical staff groups, including physiological measurement technicians.

I understand that this working group has already visited Guy's hospital, no doubt fairly quietly, to look at the work of physiological measurement technicians and medical physics technicians. The visits are to enable the group to see what technicians actually do and to find out at first hand from the people concerned what are the problems as the staff perceive them. It was able to see the work of the cardiology technicians and to discuss with them their particular problems.

When it has completed its work, the group will report back to the full management side. The group will be consulting staff side representatives, and the management side will finalise the report in time for next year's pay negotiations.

I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that the Government are aware of the problems of cardiology and other technicians and are actively trying to solve them. Pay negotiations must, of course, remain a matter for the Whitley council. As I have explained, the management side is taking positive steps to look closely at the perceived problems facing physiological measurement and other technicians within its purview. It will be seeking ways of alleviating those problems which it can positively identify.

We need to be able to recruit the staff we need, of the right calibre and to motivate them so that they remain in the Health Service. We value their work and we need them. However, this has to be done within a cost that the Health Service and the nation can afford. My hon. Friend's remarks are timely and wise. I undertake to ensure that his comments, as in previous debates, are duly noted in the appropriate quarters.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty eight minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 23 November 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

New Writ (Epping Forest)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr. Speaker do issue his warrant to the Clerk of the Crown to make out a new writ for the electing of a Member to serve in this present Parliament for the county constituency of Epping Forest, in the room of Sir John Alec Biggs-Davison, Knight, deceased.—*[Mr. Waddington.]*

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I gave you notice, Mr. Speaker, that since this motion is, according to "Erskine May", pages 326 and 327, debatable, I hope, succinctly, to raise some issues on it.

I wish to ask either the Lord President of the Council or the Government Chief Whip why it should be that there is a writ relating to Epping Forest but that there is no suggestion of a writ relating to Richmond, Yorks. I think that I am entitled to ask that question. As has been pointed out, the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) is still a Member of Parliament, but that raises the whole question of the different treatment of constituencies that are vacated by death and those that are vacated by some of our number, be they Conservative or Labour Members of Parliament, going off to another job in mid-term.

I did not, uncharacteristically, give notice to my hon. Friend the Opposition Chief Whip that I intended to raise these questions, on the ground that this is a House of Commons matter, not a party matter. If I put it in those terms, Conservative Members may understand that I am not trying to gain any party advantage.

I want to raise the vital question of Members of Parliament going off in mid-term to another job and whether they should be accommodated and facilitated. Whether we like it or not, I suspect that the electorate does not. You, Mr. Speaker, will recollect the history of the matter. George Wigg, who represented Dudley, went off to the Horserace Betting Levy Board.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has a right to debate this matter, but he must relate it to this particular writ, not to a writ that is not before us.

Mr. Dalyell: I am asking whether there is any difference in the treatment of by-elections caused by death or by one of our number going off to what may be a very hard and daunting task, but one that is nevertheless seen too often by the electorate as a cushy number.

I am reminded of a number of cases—George Wigg, Herbert Bowden going off to ITV, Tom Fraser to the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board, David Marquand to the European Commission, Roy Jenkins to the European Commission, Fred Peart to the House of Lords, and Matthew Parris. Before we go any further, the House of Commons should seriously discuss whether it is proper that those who are privileged to be elected, as we all are, ought to be allowed in mid-term to go off to other jobs. Death is excusable—*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It may also be inevitable.

Mr. Dalyell: Going on to another position is quite different. I should like to ask the Lord President in courteous terms if he will explain, before the House endorses the issuing of the Epping writ, why the Epping and Richmond by-elections are being treated differently.

Before the Richmond writ is issued, will the House have an opportunity for a serious discussion on whether we should accommodate a right hon. and learned Member who, like no other hon. Member during my 26 years in the House, has treated a Select Committee of the House, which has been asked by the House to do a job——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is going very wide of the Question. He must stick to this writ and why its timing is incorrect.

Mr. Dalyell: The timing is incorrect because it is mighty odd, given recent political history, that the Richmond writ is not before us but the Epping one is. Timing may well be something to do with that. As things stand, the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks is not a proper person for this House to send to the European Community. If he is a proper person——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is wide of the Question. The hon. Gentleman may argue that point at a different time.

Mr. Dalyell: This is a perfectly serious point. The House of Commons cannot have it both ways. Perhaps the cause of the delay arises out of the fact that, if a writ is to be issued for Richmond, the right hon. and learned Member must be a proper person to be sent to this very important job as Britain's vice-president of the European Commission. He has to be seen to be blameless. If he is blameless, then the Prime Minister most certainly is not.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a very experienced parliamentarian. I ask him to bring his remarks to a conclusion on this matter and not to go into the question of a writ for a by-election which has not yet been announced.

Mr. Dalyell: You do me the courtesy, Mr. Speaker, of saying that I am an experienced parliamentarian. It is precisely because of that and the fact that, rightly or wrongly, I have been here for 26 years that I care very much that the House of Commons should be treated properly. That is why I am doing this unusual thing—raising questions on the issue of a writ. I am anxious that Members on both sides of the House and all parties in it should be treated properly by its Members. The House is entitled to the truth from any and all of its Members. That is why I ask these questions of the Lord President.

2.43 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I understand the sensitivity of an hon. Member for Scotland on the subject of by-elections in Scotland, but the simple truth is that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) is a Member of this House, and no questions about by-elections arise in his case until he ceases to be a Member. In that event, the normal practice will apply. The House knows that, when there is to be a by-election, the Chief Whip of the party

[Mr. John Wakeham]

which previously held the seat moves the writ within four months of a vacancy arising. That is what is happening today, and there can be no reasonable objection to it.

Conservative Members did not object when the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) moved the writ for the Govan by-election, although he might have thanked us had we done so. Sir John Biggs-Davison, sadly, died on 17 September. The electors of Epping Forest have a right to expect that the writ for the by-election will be moved within a reasonable time and that once again they will be represented in this House.

I hope that the House will now agree to the motion.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I do not wish to detain the House for long.

The House has suffered a sad loss with the death of Sir John Biggs-Davison. One of the things for which I best remember him was his total opposition to one-person-operated buses. It was a concern that we shared, and I sadly miss his assistance in trying to turn the Government from continuing a course that is unwelcome in Epping as much as it is in my constituency of Newham, North-West.

Epping is not a million miles from Newham, North-West in geographic terms—although it very well could be in economic terms. We should postpone consideration of the writ for one very good reason. Hon. Members and many people who live in Epping go to see West Ham United play football in my constituency, in the borough of Newham. Before we have a by-election in Epping, I think that we should wait and see the result of the Government's proposals for the introduction of identity cards. I understand that this highly controversial piece of legislation will start its process towards the statute book in the House of Lords. I think that that is absolutely wrong, and I am using this occasion to voice my opposition. We have heard a lot about Roy of the Rovers —from whom we shall hear a little more when he speaks from the Opposition Front Bench—but, frankly, the idea of Lord Bertie Denham of the Rovers does not seem appropriate.

I believe that we should postpone consideration of the writ until the electors in Epping have had a chance to see precisely what the Government are proposing and we have had an opportunity to have that controversial legislation started here. In many ways that could influence the outcome of the by-election in Epping.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Perhaps you, Mr Speaker, would consider one aspect arising from this debate. Had the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) been appointed Steward or Bailiff of the Chiltern Hundreds, his seat would have been immediately vacated on the ground that it was an office of profit under the Crown. He has actually been appointed to an office of profit under the European Commission which, as anybody knows, requires him to take an oath to uphold the Community in all its proceedings. Therefore, the House will have to consider at some stage whether a political appointment with powers over the House of Commons, involving the taking of an oath that runs counter to the oath that he took as a Member of Parliament, ought to be considered as an appointment comparable to an office of profit under the Crown.

I am not asking you, Mr. Speaker, to rule on the matter now, but it has arisen in one or two cases. Roy Jenkins was appointed in similar circumstances and, as I recall, remained in the House for a period before the by-election which led to the filling of his seat. With great respect, since this is an innovation that we have not experienced in the long course of our parliamentary history, the Procedure Committee or the Committee of Privileges ought to give attention to whether appointments to the European Community—I am not talking about "Weekend World" or anything of that kind—should be ranked alongside offices of profit under the Crown.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a matter which the right hon. Gentleman should send to the Procedure Committee, if he feels that that is the right course to take. Now I must deal with this writ.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mr. Speaker do issue his warrant to the Clerk of the Crown to make out a new writ for the electing of a Member to serve in this present Parliament for the county constituency of Epping Forest, in the room of Sir John Alec Biggs-Davison, Knight, deceased.

Sharpeville Six

2.50 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received any approach from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs about him coming to the House to make a statement about the adverse decision by the Court of Appeal in South Africa in the case of the Sharpeville Six? You will recall that the Prime Minister said in the House that if the legal process failed, new representations would be made by her. The Foreign Secretary also said that once the legal process had been concluded new approaches would be made.

I am authoritatively advised that following today's decision by the Court of Appeal all legal options have been exhausted in the case of the Sharpeville Six and that the matter now lies in the hands of the President of South Africa and nobody else. Clearly this is a matter of exceptional urgency, because the courts can no longer intervene and the sentences of death on these innocent people will take their course unless there is political intervention by the President of South Africa.

In view of that, would it be possible to obtain a statement from the Foreign Secretary because the view of the Opposition and, I hope, the view of all hon. Members is that the time has come for the Prime Minister to pick up the telephone and make a call to President Botha asking that these innocent people should not be hanged.

Mr. Speaker: This is a matter of concern to the whole House and I am sure that what the right hon. Gentleman has said has been noted by the Leader of the House, who is sitting on the Front Bench.

State Visits

2.52 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that when I intervened in the speech of the Prime Minister yesterday about a matter relating to the possible visit of the Queen to the Soviet Union, the Prime Minister said that it was hypothetical and that the matter was not discussed at all. On 6 July 1981, in answer to a question from her hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley), the Prime Minister said:

> "The basis of advice to the Royal Family is confidential. A visit should promote the interests of the United Kingdom, be welcome to the hosts, and in keeping with the duties and dignity of the Royal Family."—[*Official Report*, 6 July 1981; Vol. 8, c. *8*.]

We have read reports in the past few days in which Bernard Ingham has been giving information to members of the press, many of whom are in the Press Gallery today, explaining that the Prime Minister, in a manner of speaking, is giving advice through the Lobby system telling the Queen not to go to the Soviet Union.

We must know exactly who is telling the truth. Is it the Prime Minister or Bernard Ingham? He has admitted to briefing the press on this matter. Who does he work for? Does he work for himself or for the Prime Minister? Has he told the Prime Minister that he is talking about this on a non-confidential basis? Something is wrong in No. 10 Downing street.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If there is, I do not see how it is a matter for me. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Skinner: It is a matter for you, Mr. Speaker, because over many years, and on 6 July 1981, we have been told that matters affecting the Royal Family are not to be dealt with in the House. You have many times prevented hon. Members from raising the issue, as have your predecessors. When we are continually told that the Prime Minister's Office says that the Queen, representing the House of Windsor, should not form a union with the House of Gorbachev, we are bound to come to the conclusion that the Prime Minister is behind it. Bernard Ingham has said that he has briefed the press. Who is telling the truth?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot see what this has to do with me in any respect.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not a matter of order for me. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would wish to apply in his chairmanship the same principles that I have to apply in mine. Come to the point of order and I shall deal with it.

Mr. Skinner: The point of order is simple. Perhaps some people are not bothered when the Prime Minister misleads the Opposition; but she should not mislead the Speaker, and that is what is happening. This information is given to us. We know that it is not true. We can stand that—we deal with it day by day. If the Speaker of the House is told that these matters are confidential but someone from No. 10 in a position of high authority briefs the press about them, that is misleading the Speaker.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is a point that is highly relevant to the House. The ruling in 1981 to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred categorically stated:

> "The basis of advice to the Royal Family is confidential."—[*Official Report*, 6 July 1981; Vol. 8, c. 8.]

The ruling does not say that it is confidential in the House; it says that it is confidential, and that applies in the House and out of it.

Under the rules of the constitution, any Minister is ministerially responsible to and answerable to the House of Commons for the antics and utterances of any of his or her officials. We have a clear admission from Mr. Ingham that he gave the briefing over the weekend that led to the outrageous headlines that have so embarrassed the Palace. I suggest that we need tomorrow a statement from the Prime Minister explaining how she reconciles her statement in 1981 with the conduct of her most trusted official over the weekend. I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, will agree that if the Prime Minister has changed that ruling in so far as it applies to her officials, we will want to change the ruling in so far as it applies to the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker: I heard what was said about this matter yesterday. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who is now the shadow Leader of the House, may wish to raise it himself with the Prime Minister. What has been said has been heard by the Leader of the House and I am sure that he will have noted it.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If hon. Members wish to raise legitimate points of order, of course I shall hear them. However, there is a long list of hon. Members who wish to take part in today's debate, many of whom sat through yesterday's debate and were not called. I have had some pretty distressed letters from them. I shall hear points of order if they are legitimate.

Mr. Winnick: My point of order is related to the point that you have just considered. You have often deprecated the way in which information is given to outsiders, and to the media, before it is given to the House. As you know, yesterday the Prime Minister denied that any decision had been made on whether the monarch was going to the Soviet Union.

You may have seen the Sunday newspapers, Sir. Every Sunday newspaper carried the same story. Undoubtedly there had been a briefing. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned Mr. Ingham. Whether by Mr. Ingham or by someone else, information has been given to the media before being given to the House. Every Sunday newspaper carried the report that the decision had been made that the Queen should not go to the Soviet Union, yet when the Prime Minister was asked about it yesterday she denied that the matter had been raised.

If the Queen is to learn, as a result of a press briefing and not as a result of information given to the House of Commons, that the Government have reached a decision, I suggest that the Prime Minister is being very discourteous to the monarch.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. You asked to what extent this matter was your responsibility. I put it to you that you are responsible in so far as it is in your name that the right to use the facilities of the House is extended to those outside. If it can be proved, as happened yesterday, that the courtesy that you extended has been abused, surely it is a matter for you. You will know that the Prime Minister denied the need to make statements on these matters at the Dispatch Box whereas, but a few hours earlier, upstairs behind the wooden walls of the Chamber, her lackey made those very statements. Is that not an abuse of the courtesy that you extended?

Mr. Speaker: I must repeat that what is said from the Front and Back Benches is the responsibility of those who say it. Provided that it is in order, I must let it happen.

TRADE

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of Statistics relating to Overseas Trade of the United Kingdom for the year 1989 and for each month during 1989.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

BILLS PRESENTED

WATER

Mr. Secretary Ridley, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary Walker, Mr. John MacGregor, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Parkinson, Mr. Anthony Newton and Mr. Michael Howard, presented a Bill to provide for the establishment and functions of a National Rivers Authority and of committees to advise that Authority; to provide for the transfer of the property, rights and liabilities of water authorities to the National Rivers Authority and to companies nominated by the Secretary of State and for the dissolution of those authorities; to provide for the appointment and functions of a Director General of Water Services and of customer service committees; to provide for companies to be appointed to be water undertakers and sewerage undertakers and for the regulation of the appointed companies; to make provision with respect to, and the finances of, the nominated companies, holding companies of the nominated companies and statutory water companies; to amend the law relating to the supply of water and the law relating to the provision of sewers and the treatment and disposal of sewage; to amend the law with respect to the pollution of water and the law with respect to its abstraction from inland waters and underground strata; to make new provision in relation to flood defence and fisheries; to transfer functions with respect to navigation, conservancy and harbours to the National Rivers Authority; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 1.]

PETROLEUM ROYALTIES (RELIEF) AND CONTINENTAL SHELF

Mr. Secretary Parkinson, supported by Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Peter Morrison and Mr. Michael Spicer, presented a Bill to confer on holders of certain petroleum licences an exemption from royalties (including royalties in kind) in respect of petroleum from certain onshore and offshore fields and to confer power to amend the Continental Shelf (Designation of Additional Areas) Order 1974 to give effect to an Agreement made between Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the Government of the Republic of Ireland relating to their respective rights in relation to the continental shelf: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 6.]

SECURITY SERVICE

Mr. Secretary Hurd, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary King, Mr. Secretary Rifkind and Mr. John Patten, presented a Bill to place the Security Service on a statutory basis; to enable certain actions to be taken on the authority of warrants issued by the Secretary of State, with provision for the issue of such warrants to be kept under review by a Commissioner; to establish a procedure for the investigation by a Tribunal or, in some cases, by the Commissioner of complaints about the Service; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 7.]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [22 November].

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Sir Giles Shaw.]*

Question again proposed.

Home Affairs

3 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): Today's debate takes place under a broad, indeed all-embracing, title devised by the Opposition: "Freedom, Fairness and Opportunity" in the United Kingdom—I am not sure how motherhood got left out. I wish to show briefly how the Government are taking action to protect individual freedom under the law and particularly to provide that climate, free from fear of crime, in which individual freedom, fair dealing and opportunity for all can flourish. It may be for the convenience of the House if I say something about the Security Service Bill which has been introduced in the House today. I am obliged to the Opposition for the opportunity to do this and to welcome the new faces in the shadow Home Office team.

The Security Service has loyally and courageously helped to defend this country since the early years of this century. It is, indeed, one of the bulwarks on which our continued freedom depends. Our intention in introducing the legislation is to ensure that the Security Service can continue to serve the country well. We need a Security Service which can help to protect us from those who want to undermine our institutions and threaten our lives, whether for their own purposes or on behalf of others.

Few people argue that this country should have no Security Service and most recognise that no Security Service can function effectively if its activities are subjected to intensive public discussion and debate, but in recent years there has been a degree of concern—and, indeed, some misunderstanding—about the arrangements under which the Security Service operates, and some concern that people who want to complain about Security Service actions against them have no real way to do so. The legislation that we propose will tackle those issues.

We shall be asking Parliament to reaffirm the principles on which the Security Service is established and the basis on which it works. We shall be inviting Parliament to establish the extent of the Security Service's duties and obligations. We want Parliament to consider and confirm the principles of ministerial responsibility and accountability for the Security Service, and we shall ask Parliament to agree to provide for complaints to be investigated without vital secrets being revealed.

The legislation will therefore give statutory authority for the continuation of the Security Service under the Secretary of State. It will establish in law the functions of the Security Service, within which it must operate. It will provide for the appointment of the Director-General of the Security Service and will make him personally responsible in law for ensuring the continued political neutrality of the service. The legislation that we propose will provide the Secretary of State with the power to authorise by a warrant those actions which are needed to obtain information from property only where he is satisfied that the information is likely to be of substantial value in assisting the service to discharge any of its functions and that it cannot reasonably be obtained by other means. A commissioner will be appointed to keep the warrant arrangements under independent review.

There will be a tribunal to receive and consider complaints, and the tribunal will refer warrant matters to the commissioner for adjudication. The tribunal will itself have specific powers of adjudication and redress, and be able to refer wider matters affecting the complainant to the commissioner. I hope that the House will notice the symmetry here. A year ago, by setting up the staff counsellor, we provided a remedy for the aggrieved or anxious member of the Security Service—a means by which he could, if need be, bypass his immediate superiors. Now we are providing a remedy for the aggrieved citizen outside the service who believes that the service may have done him or her some injury.

The commissioner will make an annual report to the Prime Minister on his work. That report, subject to identified security excisions, will be laid before Parliament.

The proposed legislation will, therefore, replace the published 1952 directive to the Director-General of the Security Service from the Home Secretary, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe. It has been the result of thorough consideration, taking full account of the experience of legislation in other countries and following on from the structure approved by Parliament in the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

The Security Service Bill follows the Interception of Communications Act model because it has been shown to work. That model recognised clearly the responsibilities of Ministers and the reasonable concerns of individuals. It found a way—and it has been shown to be a good way—of preserving direct ministerial responsibility while allowing for an independent examination of those concerns. Ministerial responsibility for those matters cannot be devolved or shared with others.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham. North): The Secretary of State has referred to "Security Service" and also to "security services" Does the proposal apply only to the Security Service MI5 or does it encompass MI6 and military intelligence? Will there be other proposals for those?

Mr. Hurd: I have been careful to use the singular throughout my speech. When the hon. Gentleman has the opportunity to read the Bill, he will see that it refers to the Security Service.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): To whom would an application for a warrant be made in relation to activities carried out by the security services?

Mr. Hurd: From time to time, right hon. and hon. Members have argued for a different approach. I am thinking especially of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), but others have rallied round him. Under that different approach, Parliament itself would set up some sort of machinery for direct supervision of the Security Service.

For reasons that I have given to the House in the past, I do not think that that makes good sense. Such a piece of parliamentary machinery would either demolish the barrier of secrecy, which is essential to the working of the service, or try to straddle it—with predictably painful results. If the body knew all, it would know that it could say little to the rest of Parliament without damaging results. If it knew little, it could say nothing with any conviction.

I concede that there has been a gap in our arrangements hitherto, but it has not lain in accountability to the House because my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I are accountable. The gap has been the absence of any way in which someone aggrieved by an action of the service could have that grievance independently investigated. Our proposals, which I have outlined, fill that gap.

The Government will be ready and there will be ample opportunity to explain the case for the legislation we are introducing. However, the Government cannot—and I do not think anyone expects it—reveal details of particular Security Service operations or activities, and we will not do so.

The legislation will give Parliament an opportunity to provide a firm and explicit foundation for the continued work of the Security Service and for dealing with complaints. It will give members of the Security Service —as they want and deserve—a clear basis on which to operate, which has been approved by Parliament. It will give the country confidence that the Security Service operates under authority and scrutiny, but with the proper degree of confidentiality that its work requires for the protection of us all.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): God forbid that this country should ever find itself at war again. However, is not one of the duties with which the security services are charged that of keeping an up-to-date list of potential saboteurs and subversives? I hope that the proposals that my right hon. Friend is now outlining will not detract from the excellent work of the security forces in the defence of the realm, and that under war measures such people would be interned. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House and the nation that we shall continue to be vigilant in the defence of the realm?

Mr. Hurd: The three main duties of the Security Service, as will be laid down for the first time in legislation, are to deal with foreign espionage, to deal with terrorism —that has been an increasing duty—and to deal with subversion, as defined first by Lord Harris of Greenwich, in a definition later reaffirmed by the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees). Those duties will remain.

In his peroration yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition tried to paint a portrait of this Government as increasingly repressive and tyrannical, particularly in this sphere of security. I say "tried" to paint a portrait because what resulted was instead a crude caricature which simply does not fit the facts. I shall list some of those facts.

First, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been far more ready than any of her predecessors to report promptly to the House on security matters. I have counted at least nine oral statements of this sort over these years. No previous Prime Minister has been so forthcoming.

Secondly, if Parliament agrees, we are about to strip away the protection of the criminal law from the great mass of official information. The demolition of section 2 of the Official Secrets Act will mean that the criminal law will no longer be there to protect the bulk of Government information, however embarrassing that disclosure may be. Budget secrets—I do not think that the Opposition have hoisted this in yet—will no longer have that protection. Nor, to pluck stray examples, will a leaked paper from the Department of Social Security or a leaked letter from the Department of Education and Science. All these have been under section 2. For years, we have heard complaints about the burden of section 2, and now the criminal law will be out of those spheres altogether.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): The Home Secretary made this claim in a debate on this subject and he challenged me to substantiate my assertion that Budget information was covered by the criminal law through other legislation. I gave him quotations and the laws. To use his own phrase, is he going to hoist this in or will he go on repeating what is not true?

Mr. Hurd: The disclosure by an official of information out of the Treasury that does not fall within the scope of the White Paper and the Bill that we are about to publish will be outside the scope of the criminal law.

Thirdly, where the protection of the criminal law is to be retained, the possibilities of prosecution will be circumscribed. In the majority of cases there will be a test of harm and in all cases it will be a jury that decides. Compare that with the proposals of the right hon. Gentleman's Government in 1978. Of course they proposed no defence based on public interest. Of course they proposed no defence based on prior publication. Of course they did not go nearly as far as we do in providing a test of harm. Most striking of all, they provided for the binding use of ministerial certificates so that at the end of the day it was the Minister, and not the jury, who decided.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Does not the substantial criticism of that contention arise where there are absolute offences? In other words, where a loyal public servant reveals crime, fraud or iniquity, he has no defence and could possibly be sent to prison for two years. Is there not something deeply offensive about that?

Mr. Hurd: There is nothing new about that proposition, because it is covered by section 2 of the Official Secrets Act.

We shall soon be publishing our Official Secrets Bill. We have been turning the language of the White Paper into statute——

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hurd: I shall continue, as I should like to get on.

We have been turning the White Paper into the language of statute, taking into account points that have been made in the House and elsewhere. The House will

[Mr. Hurd]

then be able to judge our proposals and compare them with other proposals that have been before the House, particularly the proposals that we inherited 10 years ago. I relish the thought of those detailed discussions that will follow, because I have no fears about those comparisons.

Mr. Maclennan: The right hon. Gentleman told the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) that there is no change because the section 2 procedure and the provisions of law are simply repeated. Does he not recognise that there are common law rebuttals, which were cited by Lord Goff in particular in the "Spycatcher" case, which enable public servants to pray in aid the general defence of public interest?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman is confusing the civil and the criminal law. Under the criminal law—the civil law is an entirely different matter—the kind of offence that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) cites is covered by section 2, although I agree that the term "offence" is begging the question. Such offences will continue to be covered for the reasons that I have explained and will certainly explain again when we publish our Bill. The occasion cited by my hon. Friend would be covered because we believe in the absolute extent of confidentiality. There is nothing new about that.

Mr. Richard Shepherd *rose*——

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I am anxious to get on. I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman later, but I wish to make some progress.

I am listing the facts that have not yet been fully hoisted in by our critics on the extent to which we are moving the law and practice in these matters in an open direction.

Fourthly, we have provided the staff counsellor for the Security Service that I have mentioned.

Fifthly, we are doing something that not even the most imaginative commentator predicted; we are putting the Security Service on a statutory basis on the lines that I have described.

Of course, there is plenty of scope for detailed discussion of all those proposals. I do not believe that the sun and moon revolve around such particulars or that they are passionately discussed night by night in pubs and clubs.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hurd: I have been generous in giving way. I want to conclude this point.

The discussion about particulars on which we shall pursue three major Home Office Bills will get off to a good start if it is recognised that we are talking about the particulars of an essay in openness that has no parallel in the history of our Government since the war. If, against the facts, the Opposition persist in harping on the caricature that they have created, they will make themselves ridiculous in the eyes of the electorate——

Mr. Rooker *rose*——

Mr. Benn *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: —particularly ridiculous as some right hon. Gentlemen had to strike in their time in high office the balance between individual freedom and public safety that I have mentioned. What was the record on this issue when one right hon. Gentleman was Foreign Secretary, one was Home Secretary and the other was Minister of State? The record in each case was negative, negative, negative. I am sure that that comparison should temper their comments today, although not those of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker).

Mr. Rooker: The Secretary of State said that we would have ample opportunity for discussion of these issues. Will he make it clear that the two Bills to which he is referring, in respect of the Security Service and the Official Secrets Act, will be dealt with as the Official Secrets Act was originally dealt with—on the Floor of the House, without any threat of a guillotine—and that the Government will not seek advantage in that respect? The Government have an overwhelming majority and can do what they wish, but if there is to be free and open discussion, we need to know the ground rules before we start.

Mr. Hurd: There will be a great deal of free and open discussion. I got into serious trouble once for saying that there would be no guillotine on a piece of legislation, and I shall not repeat that mistake today. The arrangements for the discussion and the procedures are not a matter for me. The Opposition have a wholly negative record on these matters.

It is natural that commentators in the press and on radio and television should be jealous of their freedoms and quick to spot even imagined threats to those freedoms. No one should have any complaint about such vigilance. We are not making the changes that I have listed out of any desire to please the commentators and I do not ask for any compliments from them, but we can ask for a professional and fair-minded assessment. Whatever the argument about particulars, such an assessment would have to start from the acknowledgement that we are making a substantial and unprecedented thrust in the direction of greater openness throughout the areas covered by the points that I have described today.

As the hon. Member for Perry Barr said, we shall be spending many hours discussing these matters in the next few months.

Mr. Benn: There will be certain matters that will require from those engaged in them life-long confidentiality to the Crown. Does that apply to Ministers and former Ministers?

Mr. Hurd: It applies to members and former members of the security and intelligence services and to those notified or designated—we are drafting—because of the nature of the work most closely connected with the services. I am paraphrasing the White Paper. When we publish the Bill, the right hon. Gentleman will see exactly how we propose to define the category.

Mr. Benn: With great respect——

Mr. Hurd: No, I shall not give way. I am proceeding.

As I have said, we shall be spending many hours discussing these matters. I relish that prospect because I think that, taken together, our proposals constitute a major thrust towards openness, the scope of which is still genuinely not absorbed by many of those who comment on these matters.

Mr. Allen: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hurd: No, I am getting on.

Mr. Allen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I asked the Home Secretary earlier to clarify confusion about the security——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not a point of order to raise through the Chair a question that a Member wishes to be answered by a Minister.

Mr. Allen: The Home Secretary has referred once again to security and intelligence services. He referred formerly to the Security Service only.

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the Minister.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) is confusing two Bills. Surprisingly, the Security Service Bill is about the Security Service. He will see that the White Paper on official secrets contains a different definition.

I am anxious that our necessary concentrations of effort should not divert the Home Office from what I regard to be the heart of its activities, which is action against crime. Increasing freedom from crime and from the fear of it is a good which we would all wish for the British people.

During the summer recess we published the latest statistics for the 12 months to the end of June. Recorded crime across the nation was shown to have declined slightly. It is far too soon to draw anything but fleeting comfort from this interruption in the 30-year upward trend. We know that such variations can be treacherous until it has been shown clearly that they are more than temporary. We can claim realistically, however, that crime prevention is beginning to affect the figures for good. It is fair to credit my successor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan)——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Predecessor.

Mr. Hurd: Yes, my predecessor. Among my right hon. and learned Friend's many movements I do not think that to succeed me is the most likely.

It is fair to credit my predecessor with giving prevention of crime its proper standing alongside detection and punishment. I have done my best to develop and reinforce what he emphasised. The crime being prevented is overwhelmingly crime against property, which makes up 95 per cent. of the whole. There were 60,000 fewer burglaries in England and Wales in the 12 months ending June this year than in the parallel period a year before. This is a 6 per cent. drop. The figures in some of the cities where crime against property is traditionally worst have been particularly encouraging and better than average. The mass of crime against property is easier to prevent than to detect. The improvements which we are beginning to see owe much to the extraordinary growth of neighbourhood watch schemes. There are now almost 60,000 schemes in England and Wales, with nearly 9,500 in London alone. That is 16,000 more schemes than a year ago. Some schemes are bound to be more active than others, but I am clear that the best are now making a substantial contribution to preventing crime.

The longer I study the problem the more convinced I am that the best crime prevention is local and specific. That is the basis of our safer cities programme. Each of our safer city projects needs sustained and concentrated attention and co-ordinated effort by local people.

Over the next three years the safer city projects will be established in 20 areas, selected from among the 57 urban programme areas. This is the Home Office's contribution to the inner-city policy. We have announced nine areas so far: Wolverhampton, Bradford, Nottingham, Coventry, Birmingham, Hartlepool, Rochdale, Lewisham and Tower Hamlets. I am glad that local authorities, regardless of party, are keen to take part and staff are being recruited in several of those places. We are aiming at a measurable reduction in targeted crime in each project area.

One in 20 crimes is violent, and it is the continuing rise in recorded violent crime which rightly causes the most alarm. Some of this rise is certainly the result of a higher proportion of crime getting onto the books. For example, as the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) would acknowledge, many more women are reporting incidents of domestic violence, and the police are dealing with them more sympathetically. Similarly, the police are recording more rapes where the offender was not a stranger but someone who knew the victim quite well—a friend, a former husband or lover. I think that the House will welcome this greater willingness of women to report such crimes and the arrangements that the police have made to encourage this.

There is that point about increased reporting, but I would not wish to sound in any way complacent about the undoubted actual rise in violent crime. I should like 1989 to be the year in which the police, the courts, the public and the Government concentrate more effectively on violent crime, while sustaining the improvement as regards crimes against property, which we can already see.

More police than ever before, swifter justice, the new law against carrying a knife without good reason, the tighter control of the private ownership of firearms, the stiffer laws against illegal and disorderly drinking, the heavier sentences being imposed by the courts on serious and violent crime and the remedy which Parliament has now provided in the Criminal Justice Act against the wayward lenient sentence—I regard all these as essential elements in this concentration against violent crime.

Prisons, which have often been neglected in the past —in the House, too—represent the denial of freedom to certain individuals for the punishment of crime and the protection of society. But, if it is to be fair, that denial of freedom must take place in decent, although austere, circumstances. No one can be satisfied with the present state of our prisons, where just over 50,000 inmates have been committed to prison, and we have accommodation designed for under 46,000.

We have made and are making strenuous efforts to remedy the years of neglect. Since 1979 spending on the prison service has risen in real terms by 43 per cent. In the Autumn Statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced further substantial increases amounting to an additional £922 million over the next three years. That will allow for an expansion of the prison building and modernisation programme to provide a further 3,000 or so prison places by 1992.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My hon. Friend has announced some interesting figures. In view of the

[Mr. Richard Holt]

evidence given to the Select Committee about the work of the Property Services Agency, is he satisfied that those extra sums will meet the current programme, let alone any expansion, because of the gross miscalculations in budgeting?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is right to put his finger on a problem, but I am increasingly confident that we are dealing with it. Even though there have been changes made in our arrangements with the PSA, he will know that we have set up a prisons building board half the members of which are from the private sector. He will know what we are doing about a contract design, and I am increasingly confident that we can deliver the prison building programme, as I have described it, within the resources that have been made available. It is an enormous commitment. It will greatly help the prison service in carrying out its tasks within a humane environment, to the benefit of both staff and inmates.

The prison population is still growing, though slightly less fast than had been expected. If the latest projections of the prison population are borne out, we should before long be able to make significant progress towards our aim of eliminating overcrowding. We expect that next year there will still be a gap of about 5,000 between the number of people in prison and the recognised number of prison places. We hope to reduce that gap to just over 3,000 by 1991-92, with a further fall in the following years.

Over the past year, we have made painful but important strides in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the prison service through the fresh start reform. Containment —keeping people locked up and secure—is of course the prison service's first task. Recently, under the sheer pressure of numbers, containment has tended to be the be-all and end-all, and the prison service has concentrated just on keeping the system going while other objectives have fallen behind.

No one in the prison service to whom I have spoken would welcome a return to the days of illusion, when it was supposed that, with enough money and skill, every prisoner could be reformed. Equally, no prison officer worth his salt is content with a system in which prisoners sometimes have to be locked in their cells for all except one or two hours out of 24, with no proper opportunities for education or work. That is no way to create or foster a sense of responsibility or to prepare a man for returning to life outside prison.

For the less serious and non-violent offender, we favour disposals outside prison altogether, and that is the purpose of our Green Paper on punishment in the community, to which my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Home Department has devoted so much work. The serious and violent should continue to end up in prison. The prison service has now received a clear restatement of purpose from the Prisons Board that I wholeheartedly endorse. I do not believe that the House has yet been informed of the statement, which says:

> "Her Majesty's Prison Service serves the public by keeping in custody those committed by the courts. Our duty is to look after them with humanity and to help them lead law abiding and useful lives in custody and after release."

We should all use our energies and all available resources to turn that statement of purpose increasingly into reality.

In a thoughtful passage in the Leader of the Opposition's speech yesterday, he told the House that freedom is not an absolute, but a question of balance between desirable objectives. I entirely agree. In the Home Office, we have to strike that balance week by week, subject by subject—whether on security or penal policy; whether in the struggle against terrorism, where we are putting together the new prevention of terrorism Bill described in the Queen's Speech; whether we are dealing with drug traffickers and their assets, or with even more prosaic matters such as Sunday trading.

I do not suppose that there is any other Department of State where those issues and the balance of which the right hon. Gentleman rightly spoke come to the fore quite so often or quite so vividly. I could give many other examples than those I have chosen today. With the help of the House, I hope that we can continue, subject by subject, to strike that necessary balance, firmly and with common sense.

3.32 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): Yesterday afternoon, the Prime Minister entertained the House with more examples of her belief that words mean whatever she wishes them to mean. Water is to be privatised, sold abroad and increased in price to protect the environment. Electricity is to be handed over to a private duopoly to increase competition. As to the Queen's visit to Moscow, it is not being addressed in any way. The Prime Minister's actual words were

> "We do not discuss this matter."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1988; Vol. 142. c.28.]

Lest there be any doubts about the implications of that sentence, I make it clear that the Prime Minister was speaking of herself in the royal plural—a form of language that other Prime Ministers felt was best left to the Queen herself.

Of course we believe the Prime Minister. We believe her in the same way that we believed the Chancellor of the Exchequer two weeks ago. But the fascination of Fridays remains. Two Fridays ago, the Chancellor said nothing about means-testing pensions. Last Friday, Mr. Bernard Ingham said nothing about the Queen visiting Moscow. We look forward to reading what was not said this Friday.

The one occasion when the Prime Minister's speech almost came to life was when she proclaimed the Government's commitment to the free society. I can only judge from that impromptu passage that the Prime Minister is temperamentally incapable of understanding how Governments in genuinely free societies behave. In a free society, the Government do not bully and browbeat broadcasters. In a free society, the Government do not buy off newspapers with knighthoods and peerages. In a free society, the Government do not suppress local government's right to exercise local options on behalf of the people that it represents. In a free society, the Government do not ignore and dismiss the interests of minorities; nor, in a truly free society, do the Government emasculate and sometimes positively destroy the institutions that protect the weak from exploitation by the powerful.

It is not, for instance, acceptable in a truly free society for the police to raid television studios, confiscate material and give no explanation or apology for actions that they could not justify in court.

Above all, it is the commitment to govern on behalf of all the people that makes Governments genuinely representative and truly democratic. It is because of this Government's determination to stifle their critics and to crush dissent that their legitimacy is in doubt. It is because of their passion to retain power by any means that they choose to govern not on behalf of all the people but in the interests of those groups of voters whom they hope will improve their prospects of re-election. A Government who cynically represent only some of the people cannot claim to be truly democratic or the true champions of freedom.

There is no area in which the Government confuse the real nature of freedom more blatantly than in their fraudulent promise to introduce what they wrongly describe as top-up loans for students. According to the Prime Minister, substituting loans for half the grant will increase freedom on one of the criteria that she offered yesterday—reducing taxation. According to more honest judges, the substitution of loans for grants will reduce freedom by preventing thousands of students from low-income families from taking their proper places in universities and polytechnics——

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will tell us about Socialist Sweden's policy on student grants; the loan rate there is 9 per cent.

Mr. Hattersley: I shall talk about Tory Britain. *[Interruption.]* I remind the hon. Gentleman who, I suspect, like me, was one of the students who went to university on a 100 per cent. grant because he came from a low-income family of which the parents could not make a contribution of any size, that 26·5 per cent. of students now come from families who cannot afford, according to the state's criteria, to make a parental contribution. In future, those students will enter higher education only in the knowledge that they will start their working lives in debt.

Mr. Holt: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: I shall not.

Many students will not have the confidence to take this risk, and as a result, young working-class people will not take up the higher education places for which they are qualified and to which they are entitled. That is an extraordinary definition of the word freedom.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I concede at once that one of the subjects that will occupy the Government this year—the broadcasting White Paper—will certainly extend freedom.

Mr. Holt: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: I keep telling the hon. Gentleman that I will not.

The broadcasting White Paper will extend the freedom of multinational communications conglomerates to monopolise independent broadcasting in this country and to reduce the standards of television broadcasting. That extension of freedom is certainly the Government's intention. It is a subject to which we shall return, as we must, when the House is given the opportunity to debate the White Paper. I hope we shall be told that that opportunity will be provided during what is loosely called the consultation period, rather than when the Government have finally set their views in concrete.

Nevertheless, we say now that there is a great and growing groundswell of opposition to the tawdry commercialism that the Home Secretary calls extended choice. The great test of the courage, as well as the integrity, of the broadcasters will be the way in which they fight against what they now openly say is wrong. Today, I merely use the broadcasting White Paper to illustrate the Government's misuse of the idea of choice.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No.

To make a genuine choice, the consumer must be given a number of real alternatives from which to make choices which are within his power to make in practice, not in theory. Extra buttons on the television set that provide no more than the same tired old films, quiz shows and American soap operas give no extra choice at all.

There is one aspect of the Gracious Speech to which we give wholehearted support—the passage that deals with the protection of children. Naturally, we need to examine the proposals in detail. We shall support any measure that provides proper protection for children in need or danger and which establishes the rights of the family and the child's proper place within it. Measures to achieve those ends will be welcomed by the Opposition, although we should be more confident about the Government's genuine concern had they not frozen child benefit in two successive years, so lowering the real value of the greatest help that lower-income families with children receive from the community.

In nine years of office, the Prime Minister has talked in the language of positive freedom in only one area of policy—the area of crime. The Prime Minister talked glibly about the Government's duty to provide the citizen with the freedom to walk the streets without fear of assault and attack. The Government have failed abysmally to provide that protection. Since 1979 the number of notifiable offences has increased by 53·4 per cent.—that is half as many again as when this law and order Government came to power.

The Home Secretary said feebly today that one of the causes of the increase in violent crime is that more is being reported. He then boasted about the stabilisation of crime in general. He did not remember to tell the House that one reason why the figure has not expanded is that fewer burglaries and break-ins are reported because, since the Government have been in office, burglaries and break-ins are taken for granted in vast areas of the country.

Mr. Hurd *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hattersley: I see that the Home Secretary is shaking his head. I shall ask him a question in his capacity as police authority for London. He supports the police idea that some crimes, including burglaries and break-ins, are so unimportant that they are bottom of the priority list and are not attended to that day or week, so why does he expect people to report such crimes? He knows that in large areas of the country, particularly in big cities, such crimes are regarded as normal, so people do not report them.

The Home Secretary showed pathetic pleasure in the fact that the overall crime figures have stabilised—although he did not concede the indisputable fact that I have just described—at an intolerably high rate. There are half as many crimes again as when the Government came to power. Violent crime continues to increase remorselessly. Violent crime in 1987 was 17 per cent. above the 1986 level and 15 per cent. up in the first quarter of 1988. The

[Mr. Hattersley]

responsibility for that terrifying increase lies in part with the society that the Government have helped to create. At one extreme there is poverty, unemployment and deprivation and at the other there is easy money and the encouragement of greed and selfishness.

The chairman of the Tory party and the Minister of State—who is probably flattered to be included in such exalted company—continually ask us to choose. Do we blame crime on the philosophy of "devil take the hindmost", in which the Prime Minister glories, or inner-city poverty, which the Prime Minister has caused? After all that expensive education, they should be able to carry two parallel ideas in their heads at the same time. Violence in home county market towns has one cause and violence in inner cities has another. In both cases, the Government have wholly failed to deal with those causes and adequately to attack the symptoms.

I concede that the Home Secretary is handicapped in his work by a liability that has weighted down all his Tory predecessors—bone-headed Back Benchers who believe that crime can be overcome only by increasingly severe penalties. Different Home Secretaries have reacted to that liability in different ways. Lord Whitelaw abandoned a plan for supervised early release from prison when his party conference told him to do so. If that plan had been operated, the prison population would be smaller than it is today by between 6,000 and 8,000.

The present Home Secretary is to be presented with exactly the same dilemma, although he could not bring himself to mention it. I understand that the Carlisle committee is about to recommend virtually the same early release scheme. We can only hope that the Home Secretary will behave with greater independence than his predecessor because in their present state our prisons breed crime rather than deter it. The Home Secretary knows that, and from time to time he stands up bravely to his backwoodsmen and tells them so. More often, however, he seeks to deflect their attacks by creating the illusion of activity.

The Home Secretary must hold the all-time record for conducting experiments and pilot schemes. His scheme to impose a time limit on the length of remand—stipulating a date by which the trial must begin—could easily have been put into operation all over England and Wales. Instead of reducing the number of remand prisoners, however, the Government have actually increased it, by extending the initial remand period from seven to 28 days. The Home Secretary has chosen to increase the number rather than reduce it.

The current illusion of activity, and the most blatant gimmick of all, is electronic tagging. I again compliment the Home Secretary on his fastidiousness; he can never bring himself to utter that phrase, in the House or outside it. The theoretical intention of tagging is to reduce the prison population. That will come about only if offenders who would otherwise have received custodial sentences are tagged instead. I do not believe that that will happen, not least because, on the evidence of the United States, the tag is risibly unreliable. Offenders who would not in any event be sent to prison will have tagging added to their community service and their probation order. The result will be their humiliation, and resentment will replace reform and rehabilitation, resulting in more crime rather than less. The only achievement will be the illusion of activity, and that only briefly.

In response to the increase in crime, which the Home Secretary does not deny, he claims that he and his party have made vast strides in increasing police manpower. The claims are made so often and so stridently that we must all ask why, with so many extra police officers, there is so much more crime. It is becoming increasingly easy to answer that question. The increase in effective police manpower is nothing like as large as the Home Secretary hopes that we will believe it to be. The Government find it convenient to claim that the Labour party is the enemy of the police. That is nonsense. What is now beyond doubt is that, because of the Government's double-talk, the police are becoming bitter critics of the Tory party.

This morning, I talked to Alan Eastwood, the new chairman of the Police Federation, who made strong complaints about the way in which the Government, in his words, have misled the public with the passages on police manpower in the public expenditure White Paper. He bases that charge on the figure of 1,150—the number of additional officers promised in the document and represented as a new initiative. Eight hundred and fifty of those additional officers were promised two years ago, so the new increase is 300 rather than 1,150, and the net increase is even smaller. Thanks to the pressure on police budgets, overtime has been eliminated in almost every police area. As a result, the true increase in police man hours—the number of officers on the beat deterring and fighting crime—is even less than that suggested by the honest figure, the real increase, of 300 officers.

My information is that every police authority in the country is now supporting every chief constable in the country in applications for more officers. The Police Federation estimates the shortfall to be 10,000. West Yorkshire needed 800 additional officers but was given 20. North Yorkshire needed 250 officers, modestly asked for 50 and got none. The Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland is so concerned about the state of policing that it is calling for a Royal Commission to examine the chronic shortage and its consequences.

The president of ACPO is terrifyingly explicit about law and order under this Government. He says:

> "Regrettably, the presence of the police is dwindling. We are losing control of the streets."

Mr. Rooker: My right hon. Friend's point about police manpower is crucial. The police in the west midlands have asked for 300 additional policemen. That request has been refused, but no Home Office Minister has taken any steps to remove from this country American citizens who have come here to encourage British citizens to adopt their private vigilante schemes. That will be the consequence of cutting the real need for additional police manpower. I warn the Home Secretary that that is happening in the Northumbrian police authority and that there have been direct attempts to encourage it in both London and Birmingham.

Mr. Hattersley: There are many ways in which the Home Secretary, who must take responsibility for these matters, is making the work of the police more difficult, against the background of fewer policemen. The idea that we should send squads of British policemen to Spain seems to me to be one of those gimmicks that is counterproductive, and the Home Secretary ought to be embarrassed just to hear that idea reiterated. It is another example of the difficulties that the Home Secretary will cause for force after force.

I now wish to turn to a further example—to wit, the Government's unworkable proposals to impose compulsory identity cards on the English Football League. Everybody who understands that issue agrees that the proposal will increase the prospect of riot and disorder outside football grounds. It is a scheme that could only have been introduced by Ministers who have never walked through a turnstile or stood on the terraces.

I repeat that it will cause chaos outside the grounds. Arsenal says that on a day when 50,000 spectators turn up at its ground, either they will have to start taking their places before 1 o'clock or the kick-off will have to be delayed by 90 minutes. The consequences of either of those alternatives can only be imagined; so can the results of the central computer breaking down. If the Department of Defence's computer in America can break down, the Home Office's Football League computer can certainly do the same. As a result of tens of thousands of genuine, honest, law-abiding football supporters hanging about outside football grounds, the criminals—who are not football supporters but use football as the occasion for their violence—will rampage through the waiting crowds, terrorising local residents and attacking local shops.

During the last two years, football violence has been substantially reduced, thanks to improved surveillance and additional money having been spent on hiring police for inside the grounds. The sensible course would have been to allow that process to continue. It would have been the sensible course, but it would not have been spectacular, so progress is sacrificed to create the illusion of activity. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the so-called Minister for Sport—who would not have been worth mentioning had he not become a caricature of all that is wrong with this Government—was on television last Monday—I repeat that he would not have been worth mentioning had he not become a caricature of all that is wrong with this Government—after the announcement of the appointment of the new chairman of the Football League. He voiced the Government's disapproval of the choice that that free and independent body had made.

The idea that an Under-Secretary should have the effrontery to announce that an independent institution had made a choice of chairman of which the Government disapproved is something that even the Home Secretary ought to find surprising. It is for that reason that I described him—and I describe him so gladly for a third time—as a caricature of this Government's typical wish to interfere in everything and to insinuate all their own placemen into positions of authority.

We now know that the Prime Minister is attempting to insinuate Sir David English into the editorship of Independent Television News. Lord Rees-Mogg—with no visible qualification, except an enthusiasm for "'Allo, 'Allo" is the chairman of the Broadcasting Standards Council. Nobody doubts that the head of the Independent Television Commission will be a card-carrying Conservative—probably a property dealer with the standards and values of Lord Young.

The identity card scheme illustrates two characteristics of the Government in general and of the Prime Minister in particular—arrogant and mindless authoritarianism. Those qualities are demonstrated in the prohibition now placed on the broadcasting of interviews with Sinn Fein and the Ulster Defence Association and in the continuation of existing provisions in the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984.

I can tell the Home Secretary that we welcome and support the Government's intention to take powers that will enable them to seize funds intended to finance terrorist organisations. It is extraordinary that such powers have not been taken before. We shall facilitate their passage through the House as best we can. We shall do that because that specific provision is practical and calculated to incapacitate the terrorists.

The general powers in the Prevention of Terrorism Act, however, are more likely to help terrorists than to harm them. The right to detain Irish men and women without charge is rightly regarded as offensive by law-abiding Irish citizens. It inevitably encourages sympathy for the argument that, democracy and civil rights being denied, violence is the only path left open to republicans.

For guerrillas to succeed, they need a hinterland into which to escape after killing a policeman or bombing a bank. Sometimes that hinterland is a forest or a mountain; sometimes it is a sympathetic population. The Government have foolishly increased sympathy towards terrorists and, by doing so, dangerously extended the hinterland into which the murderers and bombers can disappear. They have done so with a cavalier disregard for civil liberties.

I have emphasised, as I always do, the pragmatic objections to the prohibitions on broadcasting and to the prevention of terrorism provisions, because that is the argument which the Government are most likely to accept. The argument in principle—the argument of a free society—is just as overwhelming, but unfortunately it is not an argument which the Government even consider, and that is demonstrated by their recent record.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): The right hon. Gentleman speaks of freedom in society, but does he not concede that football hooligans and terrorists are those whom we have to prevent from acting if we are to have freedom in society? Are they not the people who are preventing freedom? Are they not the people to whom the right hon. Gentleman should turn his attention?

Mr. Hattersley: Of course. My complaint is that, instead of beating them, the Government want to get headlines about beating them. The Government want to appear to be active rather than genuinely to be active and to obtain the results which I understand the hon. Gentleman and I both want.

I should like for a moment to consider the Government's record on the great issue of civil liberty before I consider their proposals for the Security Service and the Official Secrets Act 1911. The pursuit of the wretched Peter Wright through court after court, even though the Government must have known that they would lose in the end, was a scandalous misuse of public money and came very near to an abuse of our legal system.

That abuse was performed for two wholly unworthy reasons—first, to postpone the day when the Prime Minister was proved wrong; secondly, to prevent the British people from knowing what was certainly known in the Kremlin and freely available in every country in the world with bookshops. The Government's attitude

[Mr. Hattersley]

towards the Official Secrets Act 1911 and towards security has to be measured against that record and their willingness—indeed, their enthusiasm—to suppress information for reasons which were not national necessities but political convenience.

The Home Secretary has today announced his intention to put the Security Service on a statutory basis. Being an old-fashioned sort of Conservative, the Home Secretary always meets pressure with small concessions rather than with obstinate refusal. This is a small concession in response to the massive concern which is increasingly felt about the uncontrolled—indeed, sometimes unlawful—operations of the Security Service. We welcome it and hope—hope subject to examination of the Bill—to support what the Home Secretary proposes. But it is important to keep the concession in perspective.

The Security Service will remain totally outside the scrutiny of the House. From time to time we shall receive a report on its work which has been sanitised by the Prime Minister. As for questioning its conduct—not its operation but its general conduct, its policy and its financing—the House will have no powers at all. The Prime Minister was explicit about that yesterday when she said that she will be accountable, as she had always been accountable. We know exactly what that means.

The security services—like the security services of other democracies—ought to be subject to the authority of the House because that would increase efficiency and provide a safeguard against abuse. It is the fantasy quality of their existence that so often has made our security services ridiculous, tapping the telephones of innocent trade unionists while Soviet agents are promoted within their own ranks. Parliamentary control would help to bring the security services into the real world, where they would operate with more despatch and efficiency and with more respect for civil liberties.

I hope that we can support the Home Secretary in the little concession that he has made. In preparation for that, I ask him two questions. The Secretary of State has told us that he will have to issue a warrant to authorise action to "obtain information from property". Does that mean that another raid on the BBC in Scotland would have to be authorised explicitly by him, and would he have to accept responsibility for it? He told us that a tribunal will examine complaints against the service from the general public. When a complainant has had his cause examined, will he be able to pursue the result of that complaint through the courts, particularly if he is not satisfied that the tribunal, an essentially internal organisation, has treated him justly?

I hope that the Home Secretary will answer those questions when he replies to the debate, but in the meantime will he remember that—whatever he may have hoped—providing a limited amount of statutory form for the security services does not make an unacceptable secrets Bill any more acceptable than it was before his announcement?

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that to put the security services under the control of the Home Secretary might seem a great advance, and to some extent it might be an advance, but does it not smell of the "Minister of the Interior" in certain eastern European countries? Who would trust that lot? I do not trust them at all. Quite honestly, I am more worried about that than about anything else. If it were placed under the House of Commons, and we had the decision and we controlled it, it would be different. I do not want to put the security services under any particular Government. That already exists privately. Is my right hon. Friend not worried about that?

Mr. Hattersley: Risking the wrath of my hon. Friend, I must say that I find the Home Secretary an unlikely commissar—a rural dean perhaps, but not a commissar. However, I agree that the real place for the authority to reside is in the House of Commons, as it does in the legislatures of the United States, Australia, Canada and other countries where there is more liberty and accountability on these matters and more efficient security services. The idea that our Security Service—which, putting it at its gentlest, has not always been regarded with universal respect during the past 10 years—could be made less efficient by making it accountable is clearly nonsense.

Finally, I turn to the proposed new Official Secrets Act, which I understand from what the Home Secretary has said today will come before us virtually in the form described in the White Paper. That means that, far from liberalising our legislation, the new Bill will provide the Government with greater powers to withhold and conceal information which might be politically embarrassing to them. In many particulars, the new Act will be more authoritarian than the old. The veneer has been replaced, but underneath the wood is still rotten. There is no substitute for an Act which safeguards only genuine secrets, allows, ultimately, an authority outside the Government to decide what are genuine secrets, and is augmented by freedom of information legislation.

Paragraphs 41 and 42 of the White Paper make the position absolutely clear. Everything that the Government define as "relating to security" must be kept secret at all times. What does or does not "relate to security" is for the Government to decide. Whoever is involved or associated with security must remain silent about all they do. The definition of "involved" and "associated" is for the Government to decide. In no area which the Government define as concerning security will it be possible for a court of law to decide whether or not the publication of an item of information would damage the national interest. Anyone responsible for such a publication would automatically be guilty of a criminal offence.

The proposals legitimise all the Government's recent excesses, with one exception. "Spycatcher" would still be suppressed; Anthony Cavendish would still be prevented from privately printing his reminiscences; Sarah Tisdale would still go to prison, and so would Cathy Massiter. There is only one notable change. Clive Ponting, who was acquitted under the old law, would have been convicted under the new law because it does not allow a public interest defence.

The great difference, which I hope the Home Secretary will struggle to understand, is that, while in the past the public interest defence has been there by implication, it is now to be ruled out specifically and explicitly by statute. In a free society, it ought to be possible for a civil servant to say, "What the Government are doing is wrong and what the Minister is saying is not true, and it is my moral duty to expose the Government's corruption by telling the truth."

We all take a strange vicarious pride in the story of the marine colonel who said to President Nixon, "I took my oath of allegiance not to the President of the United States but to the constitution of this country." The defence, "I did it because it was right," is wholly removed from the law if the Bill proposed by the Home Secretary passes into our legislation. When the new Act has been passed, invoking a public interest defence, saying, "I did it because it was true and I said it because it was right," will be a confession of guilt.

Nor will it be possible to argue under the new law that, since the information being revealed had already been revealed, to repeat it can in no way prejudice the national interest. The book may have been published in Australia, the story may have been told in Moscow and the film rights may have been sold in America, but if the Home Secretary classifies the information as involving security, anyone who repeats it will be committing a criminal offence.

All we need to know about the new powers is that criminalising the disclosure of information sent in confidence from one Government to another has been inserted in the Bill to ingratiate the Government with the American Administration, when it is a proposal which the Senate of the United States would not contemplate passing into law. Indeed, the proposals would be unlawful under the American constitution, yet the Government continue glibly to talk about freedom.

No Government this century have been more contemptuous of true democracy. No Government this century have been more determined to suppress criticism and more unscrupulous in manipulating the news. The Government are motivated above all else by the Prime Minister's authoritarian impulse, and that instinct is wholly alien to our system and to our country.

4.8 pm

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I have to confess that I did not attend the Loyal Address yesterday because I was returning from the north-east of England where on Monday night I attended the awards of Business Enterprise, an organisation run by Tyne-Tees Television, *The Journal* newspaper and the Northern Development Corporation showing how well things are today in the north-east of England, how they are improving, how industry is flourishing and how job prospects have not been better for many years because at long last people have stopped trying to cling to the past and are looking to the future.

The future of the north-east in Conservative hands has now been recognised as the way forward, as is the case in the south-east of England, the south of England, London and East Anglia, and prosperity is moving into the north-east of England. That was identified at the meeting on Monday evening when the awards were presented for the first time. This is the first time that such an opportunity has been presented in the north-east. We have been assured that the scheme will continue and that every year these five awards will be made to the five categories of companies that won them on Monday. The awards are for innovation and training and are given to large and small enterprises. Those north-eastern based firms have used the skills of the generations there. They are cultivating those skills and looking forward to the opportunities that will arise.

The north-east has turned the corner, but the Government should recognise that we now need a straight road. On Monday night there was some heavy snow when I was in the area and that made driving conditions difficult. However, they are difficult with or without snow, because of the lack of a major motorway from the south to the north-east. It is time that the Government woke up to that.

As a result of the shortage of equipment at King's Cross, 31 people died and the Government suddenly found £266 million to do something about it. Many more people have been killed on the A1 and M1 motorway. In the last eight years, 150 people have been killed on that road and the number of serious and slight accidents far outweighs anything that happened at King's Cross. Of course all those deaths and accidents did not happen in one dramatic night and receive great media attention. It is a constant drip, week in and week out, and people are killed and maimed because of the lack of a motorway.

Government statistics clearly show that a motorway is statistically five times safer than a dual carriageway. In the last eight years, 33 people have been killed on the motorway and 117 have been killed on the main road which is not of motorway standard. How many people have to be killed before the money is found to improve the safety on the road to the north-east of England? If the roads are improved, the north-east will be opened up and the industries and companies that I mentioned will have the opportunity to use the Channel tunnel when it is opened.

The north-east does not feature specifically in the Queen's Speech in terms of the economy, but it features in connection with child sex abuse. I and the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) have been asking for a debate on that subject for some time, and the Second Reading of the Bill on the care and protection of children will give us the opportunity for such a debate. In the meantime, it is worth putting on record the fact that there was never a child sex abuse crisis in Cleveland: there was an abuse of privilege by doctors. The statistics in Cleveland show that the number of reportable cases of child sex abuse up to the time when the two doctors had their brainstorm and the number of cases since the hon. Member for Middlesbrough and I raised the matter in the House, which led to the Butler-Sloss inquiry, are exactly the same.

There was an interregnum during which doctors misdiagnosed children and had them taken from their parents. That created an atmosphere of fear in Cleveland which remains to this day—primarily because of the spinelessness of Cleveland county council which refused to take action against the director of social services and his principal consultant on child abuse. It is also due to the seemingly endless reluctance of the area and regional health authorities to take positive action to ensure that those two hideous doctors are never again allowed to examine children or to have then removed—stolen, kidnapped—from their parents and taken to places about which the parents did not know. What is more, the parents could not find out where their children were.

Many innocent families have been ruined as a result of the actions of the four guilty people that I mentioned. They were backed by Cleveland county council, which was afraid of the shop steward of the National and Local Government Officers Association, who told the Council not to take disciplinary action. That was after the council's all-party committee had issued a report saying that the council must take disciplinary action. The chairman of the committee sat mute, saying nothing when the opportunity arose for Cleveland county council to take such action.

[Mr. Richard Holt]

We still have to live that down in the north-east. It will take some time and there will be no improvement until we have removed those people in Cleveland county council who were responsible for the perpetuation of the situation. If the Labour party will not do that between now and next May, we shall do it after May when we come to power in Cleveland.

I should like to turn to another matter that does not relate specifically to the north-east, except that, as everyone knows, the north-east is the best place in the world for soccer. I should like to draw attention to the Government's likely proposals on identity cards. Today I tried to find out about those proposals. I sought a White Paper or any information so that Members who wanted to speak could do so with a little knowledge on the subject. However, we do not have that information, and I want to put one or two questions to my hon. Friend. I have an open mind on the subject and will need to be persuaded before I support the Government.

Who will have the identity cards? How will we determine at what age a person becomes a hooligan? Will women have identity cards? Are they also potential hooligans, brick throwers and muggers of old ladies? Are we to say that only a narrow group of people, the head bangers, need to be issued with identity cards? How do we identify head bangers? That might seem easy, but there are always borderline cases and I wonder what practical methods the Government have in mind. I freely admit that on Saturday, for the first time for a couple of years, I went to a soccer match because Guisborough Town, in my constituency, was playing in the first round proper of the FA cup. The team was cheated by biased refereeing. The referee should have been hounded out of the ground and should not be given an identity card.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): Name him.

Mr. Holt: I do not wish to do that.

I talked with the men who run Guisborough Town football club after the game when they were having a drink and expressed my commiserations. They do not know what would have happened if they had beaten Bury and gone on to the next round. What would have happened with membership cards?

Mr. Hattersley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Holt: The right hon. Gentleman would not give way to me, so I shall not give way to him.

The proposed changes may or may not lead to that club incurring expenses.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Holt: I certainly will.

Mr. Foulkes: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman at any opportunity. He has highlighted a number of examples showing how unworkable the Government's proposed scheme is. Has he contemplated the difficulty that will arise when Scots football fans want to go to England——

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): What about Berwick?

Mr. Foulkes: Yes, or fans from Berwick, which is in the Scottish league but is in England. What will happen to Scots fans or English football fans from Berwick who want to go to the international match at Wembley, where we understand fans will be obliged to register as supporters of English football clubs before being entitled to get membership cards? Is that not yet another example of how unworkable and ridiculous the scheme is? I speak as a supporter of the Heart of Midlothian football team, which is the only British team still in any European competition. I know that the whole House would wish the team every success in the game against Velez Mostar at Tynecastle this evening.

Mr. Holt: I wish the Heart of Midlothian team every success. I follow the results in the newspapers, but I do not want the hon. Gentleman to lead me into the minefield of Scottish and English legislation on this subject. It will be bad enough trying to impose this scheme on the English soccer leagues without trying to impose it on the Scottish leagues.

I am worried about the wording that has been used. We talk about "soccer hooligans". Hooliganism is not confined to soccer. I have recently been to cricket matches where all has not been too kosher. I have been to rugby league and rugby union matches at which one or two people have been slightly offensive. I have even been to race courses and seen the odd person drunk at a race meeting—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh".] I must, of course, declare my interest. The Jockey Club has recognised the problem. Last week it introduced regulations so that what has been happening at football matches will not happen at race meetings.

How long will it be before a Government—not necessarily the present Government, because time will move on—say, "We shall introduce identity cards, not merely for soccer but for cricket, rugby union, rugby league, hockey, ice hockey, speedway meetings, or tiddlywinks."? How far will we go? Will there be one large piece of plastic endorsed with all the sports, or will we have to produce 47 in a concertina?

Mr. John Patten: I have listened to my hon. Friend with great fascination and I hesitated to interrupt. Does he agree that we might not be in this position if the football authorities a good many years ago, when they saw the onset of violence on the terraces, had taken the same speedy action that the Jockey Club is taking to ensure that race course violence does not spread?

Mr. Holt: My hon. Friend has a point, but it is not necessarily the overriding point. The Government have at their disposal other weapons that they could have used against football clubs that refused to accept a code of practice. Luton football club—of which my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) is a supporter—introduced the scheme voluntarily and it works well. Why could not the Government have used persuasion? What failure of communication by the Government or persuasion would have reduced the need to bring in identity cards? As I said, I need to be persuaded. Will I need to carry a large piece of plastic endorsed with all the sports?

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the subject of identity cards, will he confirm that, given that Guisborough was playing Bury at

Ayresome Park and the venue had been fixed a week before, under the Government's system of identity cards the hon. Gentleman and 6,000 others could not have gone to the match?

Mr. Holt: That worries me.

I am equally worried about another matter. I have a friend who works in New York and has been there for about 18 months. He is coming home for Christmas. I was talking with his wife and suggested that we see a soccer match. I freely confess that I do not often go to soccer matches, but my friend is a fan and when he returns to this country he will want to watch a soccer match. He may not necessarily want to go on his own. Perhaps he would like to take me with him, and we would go together. We would sit and chew the cud. Instead of doing that, we shall be prevented from going to the match and perhaps will have to spend all day in a pub instead of in the fresh air. That is where we will be driven by the Government's proposed scheme.

What happens to the so-called fan who loses his identity card? What is the Government's provision? Do they say, "You have been a naughty boy at Arsenal, so we are taking your Arsenal fan's card away, but there is nothing to prevent you from going to Millwall next week and signing up there."? With the 92 clubs in the League, it would not be unreasonable to presume that, during the period when hooligans want to go around throwing bricks through windows, they could get into every club.

What sounds good in practice—like prohibition in America—will not necessarily work out, unless someone has thought through all the details and problems. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, when recently asked on television how he would fund radio in the future, said, "We have not thought of that yet." The authorities did not know how to fund radio when the proliferation of stations began a few years ago.

Talking of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary reminds me that I wanted to intervene when the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was speaking about education. I wanted to give him the opportunity to say whether he agreed or disagreed with the remarks on Monday this week on BBC Radio Cleveland by the Front-Bench spokesman on education, the hon. Member for Durham North-West (Ms. Armstrong), who said that it was now part of the Labour party's thinking to introduce a tax on graduates. After graduating, people will have a different tax system from that applying to anyone else. In that way, graduates will pay back more.

If a Front-Bench spokesman says that publicly on BBC radio, clearly there has been some thinking along those lines and that statement must have some credibility. I shall give way to the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook if he wishes.

Mr. Hattersley: No.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar) *rose*——

Mr. Holt: Then I give way to the hon. Lady.

Ms. Mowlam: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was suggesting that a woman from Durham, North-West and one from Redcar were in some way interchangeable when he looked across for someone to whom to give way. If the hon. Gentleman had listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong), he would have heard her say that the Labour party was thinking, as it is in its policy review, of many different ideas. I wish that the hon. Gentleman would use his verbs and adjectives a little more carefully.

Mr. Holt: I am grateful to the hon. Lady because she has confirmed that the Labour party is thinking of this approach. Is not the example of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was thinking of things when he spoke to the press, similar to that of an official Front-Bench spokesman of the Labour party speaking publicly on BBC radio? That point is worthy of a reply at some time, and I shall willingly give way to the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook to give it.

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Gentleman has been at great pains to tell us all that he knows about betting and racing. If he wants to have a little gamble with me on whether, when the thought is over, it is included in our policy, I shall gladly take him for a quid or two.

Mr. Holt: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman has been listening. I never mentioned betting. I mentioned horse racing, but I will willingly take a bet from him at the appropriate time.

I am pleased to have had this opportunity to speak in this debate. Before you, Mr. Speaker, do as the silly referee did on Saturday by giving a red card to the captain of Guisborough halfway through the first half so that 10 amateurs then had to play against 11 professionals and did not concede another goal, I will resume my seat—but I suggest that the Government should watch out, as I have given them an orange card in relation to my vote.

4.29 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): The Queen's speech contains one measure that virtually the whole House will support—the intention to bring in a Bill to rationalise the law governing the care and protection of children. As one who introduced the Children Act 1975, I believe that it is time to bring important areas of children's legislation up to date and to learn from experience. I hope that the legislation will also provide an opportunity to introduce family courts. In my view, it would be a tragic omission if that opportunity were not taken.

Another advantage of the debate on the Queen's Speech is that it gives the country and the House an opportunity to clarify attitudes to privatisation—an issue on which there has been far too much dogma and ideology. The two privatisation issues in the Queen's Speech reflect both the advantages of privatisation in creating real competition, as I believe will be the case in electricity generation, and the grave disadvantages of privatisation when a public monopoly simply becomes a private monopoly, as will be the case with water privatisation.

With regard to electricity generation costs, if we can at long last break through the wall of silence and duplicity that has been characteristic of the Central Electricity Generating Board—one of the worst public monopolies with which I have had to deal—we may then discover the true cost of nuclear power generation, including the storage of waste and the decommissioning of power stations, and be able to make far more sensible decisions about future generating stations. It might also encourage people to put up projects for water barrages and other forms of electricity generation, which many of us believe to have far greater potential than has been recognised so far.

[Dr. David Owen]

I believe that water privatisation, far from giving any encouragement to the environment, is likely to be a sorry story, with the principle that the "polluter pays" being put into reverse and the principle that the "consumer pays" being endorsed. Even more worrying is the prospect of vast tracts of this country, areas of outstanding natural beauty and national parks currently under the control of the water authorities, being opened up to speculative building and edging away in a fashion which I believe will cause considerable anxiety on both sides of the House.

When the land implications become apparent—let alone the implications of French water companies purchasing our water authorities—with vast parts of the Peak District, the Lake district, Dartmoor and Exmoor being opened up to private profit and speculation, I believe that many Conservative Members will have to rethink their position on water privatisation. It is wrong in principle, it will be damaging in effect, and it is a form of privatisation that we shall oppose.

We shall, however, support electricity privatisation, just as we supported steel privatisation, in the belief that it will introduce competition in the domestic electricity market just as steel privatisation introduced competition in the international market.

The main subject of today's debate is freedom and I shall focus the main part of my speech on that. We have had a great deal of rhetoric and a great many speeches and articles about the grave threat to our freedom and democracy posed by the Government. Certainly they have been extremely careless on a number of important issues involving freedoms. Their handling of GCHQ gave offence to millions of people because underlying it was the unstated belief that the mere fact of being a member of a trade union meant that one could not be trusted with the nation's secrets.

That first abuse of freedom by the Government has been followed by many others in other areas. For instance, the decision to sink the Belgrano was a perfectly justified military decision but the refusal to give the full facts allowed people to believe that there was something far more sinister behind that purely naval decision. We began to see a paranoid attitude to the revelation of information necessary to clarify the public position. The same was true of the Westland affair. That was far more a case of the Prime Minister trying to save face, but there were alarming aspects such as the way in which confidential advice from the Attorney-General was able to be used in a manipulative fashion.

Other features have included the police raid on BBC Scotland. The way in which that broadcasting issue was handled cannot be a matter of pride to any Member of the House. The Government's record is not a great one and they made us the laughing stock of the world by pursuing the "Spycatcher" case through every twist and turn. As people began to realise that the purpose was largely to cover up lapses and incompetence in the original pursuit of Mr. Wright, many of us began to be deeply worried about the Government's overall intentions.

In my view, one of the dangers is that the suspicions and anxieties aroused by those specific instances have led to a generalised attack on measures undertaken by the Government in relation to terrorism. Personally, I find that rather distressing. Hitherto, it has been a tradition of the House that in matters which really affect the security of the state, especially in dealing with terrorism, wherever possible party politics is set aside, we try to achieve a consensus and if there is any doubt the benefit of that doubt is given to the Government. That tradition, which I regard as a good tradition, seems to have been thrown away in recent months. I wish to show that the House is in danger of losing something rather important in this respect.

In all these matters, we must take account of what we are doing in Northern Ireland. It is no use thinking that Northern Ireland is somehow separate. In my judgment, the situation in Northern Ireland is gravely deteriorating. There are signs of a loss of confidence in the system of justice, a considerable deterioration in the security situation and some quite horrendous acts of violence.

When we discuss freedom, we must remember that, with the exception of a few countries, and certainly in terms of the democratic industrialised nations, Britain is dealing with the worst internal terrorist situation of any country—far worse than the one that the Spanish are dealing with in the Basque country. To grapple effectively with terrorism means restraining civil liberties and restricting freedom. Only a fool could believe otherwise. That being so, we must examine with extreme care every step that we take, and every step that the Government ask us to endorse, they too should examine with extreme care.

We owe a loyalty to the state, but what is the state? It is certainly not the Government. We do not owe a loyalty to the Government, but we owe a loyalty to the monarch, to Parliament, to the armed services, to the judiciary and even to Ministries. That is the loyalty that we owe, both as individual citizens and as Members of Parliament.

However, it goes wider than that. The BBC also owes a loyalty to the state. It should bear that in mind when considering its role and that of its reporters in dealing with the issue of terrorism. At one point during the Falklands war, an internal memorandum was sent out by the then head of BBC radio news—to my great anxiety, he is now the controller of editorial policy—stating:

> "When we say our troops, our ships, we sound to people as if we were the mouthpiece of government. We are not Britain. We are the BBC."

The BBC is Britain, and it had better start representing the views and feelings of the British people. It does not always have to follow the majority view, but when it is considerably out of kilter with public opinion it should hesitate.

Of course, the BBC is not the managing director or the paid officials; its ultimate safeguard is the board of governors. It must have been with great regret that the Government felt it necessary to issue a notice telling the BBC what they wished it to do on actuality reporting. I certainly regret that, and the BBC's governors should regret it. They should ask themselves why it was necessary for the Government to introduce new measures. Why could they not listen not just to the voice of the Government but to the voice of common sense throughout the country?

When the BBC described the so-called gag on broadcasting, it took a long time for many to realise that it was in fact describing a gag that has been operating since 1976 in the Republic. When has the BBC exposed that as a monstrous abuse of civil liberty? Why did it not realise the difficulty inherent in allowing people who could not make such statements in the Republic to do so through ITN, the BBC and other broadcasting media?

The commentators were right to say that we should not consider the reduction in the freedom of the airways or television screens purely and simply in a Northern Ireland context. It restricts our freedom on the mainland to learn of the horrendous statements made by Sinn Fein. Indeed, there have been occasions when it has been salutary to hear them in all their horror. However, we must consider the balance between freedom and security.

If it appears to work in the Republic, is it not at least worth a try in the deteriorating state of Northern Ireland? As it was introduced by the Fine Gael-Labour coalition and by a Minister with the liberal credentials of Connor Cruise O'Brien, we should not immediately leap to describe it as some great Fascist clampdown and use such language as must have given great succour to the governments in Chile and South Africa. To have our Government's actions likened to the great abuses of human and civil rights in those countries is to cheapen debate and to damage this country.

I hope that we can stop the argument about the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The country needs such an Act and it should be supported by all parties. It is sad that the Labour party and the Social and Liberal Democrats will not support such an Act being permanently placed on the statute book. They should remember that the Act was introduced only after a bomb was placed in a Birmingham pub. Many people in Northern Ireland do not believe that we would ever have acted had it not been for that act of monstrous violence on the mainland. It is important that we ask ourselves whether we are prepared to argue the case only in the context of what is happening in Northern Ireland. We should remember that what is happening over there could well return to the mainland on a major scale.

Of course, the Act does not deal only with Northern Ireland. The level of international terrorism has increased substantially since Roy Jenkins, the then Home Secretary, introduced it. It was intended as a temporary measure, but "temporary" has gone on and on. We all look forward to the day when the Act can be permanently repealed, but anyone who thinks that it can be done immediately is living in a world remote from reality. International terrorism will be on our doorstep for a long time to come and, sadly, few can envisage an immediate solution to the Northern Ireland problem.

I read with shock and amazement that the Labour party does not even want to support any change in the remission of sentences—yet 20 to 25 per cent. of those convicted of serious terrorist-related crimes in Northern Ireland in 1984 committed another terrorist offence within two years. All that is proposed is to bring the remission practice for serious crime in Northern Ireland into line with that on the mainland. How can anyone seriously suggest that we should not do that? Most people think it outrageous that Northern Ireland terrorists have had preferential treatment.

I urge the BBC to have some sense of proportion when dealing with the question of terrorism. I also urge a sense of proportion in the way in which we discuss these matters in the House. There should be a return to the principle that, wherever possible, the House supports the Government of the day on such measures—and that, if there is doubt, the Government should be given the benefit of the doubt.

As to other measures which are to be introduced, I do not have a great belief in the declaration of democracy, but I realise how deeply offensive it is for people in local government to hear someone in a local council chamber justifying a terrorist attack that may have involved a council employee. The Government have made a mistake in not allowing the Director of Public Prosecutions to bring the prosecution, but instead to leave it to the poor individual or group of individuals to club together to take action. However, all the measures are worth a try because of the deteriorating position in Northern Ireland.

As I have said before, we are not doing anything near enough about the problem on the border. Three years on from the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Republic's army cannot even speak to the British Army—they have to go through the Garda and then the RUC. Can that really be serious cross-border collaboration? Can that be a really serious advance of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in dealing with security? Two armed services who are meant to be patrolling the border cannot even speak to each other.

If the Republic cannot deliver more on cross-border security, the British Government should be prepared to reconsider other measures. It is said that the border cannot be sealed—tell that to Israel or any other country that has had to deal with terrorism. It is not simply just preventing sophisticated weaponry coming across the border; there is the problem of people simply slipping away, across the border, to take a holiday. They should be put under constant psychological pressure and strain, week by week, month by month and year by year.

I do not wish to speak only about terrorism. We cannot make advances in Northern Ireland's security by security measures alone. There are political problems. There should be a greater devolution of government to Northern Ireland. We cannot continue with our procedures for dealing with Northern Ireland legislation in this House, and I beg the parties in Northern Ireland to discuss devolution. It is a difficult position for the Unionists, given their opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. They were right, and many of us were wrong, when they predicted that the majority of decent, sensible people in Northern Ireland would not live with the agreement. I had grave doubts at the time. Many people who are not in the slightest degree political believe that the Anglo-Irish Agreement is a step towards accepting a gradual erosion of the presence of the Northern Irish within the United Kingdom, and they do not like that. Therefore, it is hard to ask political parties to come together in any way that is related to that Agreement to discuss a political solution.

A good solution has been suggested, and I recommend it to the House. It is that an independent chairman should be appointed to chair a meeting of all the political parties so that they can discuss devolution. I say that with no disrespect to the Secretary of State, who I believe does a good job and has a great deal of respect and admiration in the House, but he is a party to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and is a part of the British Government. His chairmanship and his role will not bring together the parties who will have to come up with the devolution package that is desperately needed.

I have talked about duty to the state. It is not a duty to agree with everything that the Government do but a duty to try to look at the overall security of the state. So we come to the new Bill on the Security Service. I have compared this Bill to the Maxwell Fyfe directive under

[Dr. David Owen]

which successive Governments have lived, and the language of the Bill has none of the rigour and the safeguards in the governance of the Security Service that I should like to see. This may be a problem of parliamentary drafting, but one has only to compare the language. For example, the Maxwell Fyfe directive says:

"It is essential that the Security Service should be kept absolutely free from any political bias or influence and nothing should be done that might lend colour to any suggestion that it is concerned with the interests of any particular section of the community, or with any other matter than the Defence of the Realm as a whole."

The Bill says that it is necessary

"that the Service does not take any action to further the interests of any political party."

What a massive difference.

Let us take another example. The Maxwell Fyfe directive says:

"No enquiry is to be carried out on behalf of any Government Department unless you are satisfied that an important public interest bearing on the Defence of the Realm, as defined in paragraph 2, is at stake."

That is clear, decisive, fine language. The Bill says that it is necessary

"that there are arrangements for securing that no information is obtained by the Service except so far as necessary for the proper discharge of its functions or disclosed by it except so far as necessary for that purpose".

I should like the Maxwell Fyfe directive to be taken word for word and put in the Bill. It is fine language that successive Governments and Home Secretaries——

Mr. Tony Benn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Owen: No, I know what the right hon. Gentleman will say. I take his point. The Maxwell Fyfe directive has not covered us on everything.

Mr. Benn: It has not done us a lot of good.

Dr. Owen: The right hon. Gentleman should bear in mind the fact that the Security Service has also done a lot that is praiseworthy. It has been an honourable service and many people have been safeguarded by it. It has had some bad elements within it and that rightly causes the right hon. Gentleman concern, as it causes concern to many hon. Members on both sides of the House.

That leads naturally to the next question. This legislation is to be welcomed, but where is parliamentary scrutiny? Every other Bill that becomes an Act has a form of parliamentary scrutiny. Where is it in this Bill? In the past, the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister relied on not having to answer questions about the Security Service.

There is also the intelligence that we gather from overseas. Some would argue that that should have the same treatment. I do not believe that to be the case. I did not believe it when I was in government, and I do not intend to start believing it now. However, I believe now, as I believed then, that there is a strong case for the activities of those Ministers involved in the security and intelligence services within this country and outside the country being subjected to some measure of scrutiny.

The Security Commission already exists, but it is outside the parliamentary sphere. One could almost marry the Security Commission and Parliament. It would not be hard if the commitment were there. This comes to a question of the Prime Minister's attitude. When the Falklands war started, many of us argued that the best way to put behind us what had happened in the past was to agree to set up a committee of inquiry after the war was over. The Prime Minister did not like it. It was like dragging teeth out of her to get her to agree to the Franks inquiry. She eventually agreed, and it had the effect of unifying the House.

There were no arguments, throughout the Falklands war, about "what might have been" and no attempt to go over what might have been done. The matter was left on one side until the Franks committee report. I did not agree with its recommendations, but it carried an authority, it had representatives from the House on it and it was a fundamental and important, although after-the-event, examination of what had happened.

That report established a precedent that we should follow now, but the Prime Minister still does not agree with us. However, why can she not occasionally do something with which she does not agree, because she can see that it has a wider merit? By doing that, she would make it much easier for many hon. Members who have good will towards the security and intelligence services, who wish them well and believe them to be necessary, and who know that they must be kept secret. Many are horrified over the last eight or nine years of the Prime Minister's tenure to see that more important secrets have gone out into the public domain than at any other time.

I have watched this happen from GCHQ onwards. I have seen that, every time we have had a controversy about the security and intelligence services, in the last nine years, more important and damaging information about the security of the realm has leaked or been divulged—matters that we had thought were so serious that we would have gone to court about, and did go to court about, are now commonplace and known by millions. The present system has not worked, and it would be better to vest responsibility out of the House.

The Home Secretary talked about the barrier of secrecy and said that if a parliamentary committee came within the barrier of secrecy, it would not be able to report on these matters to the rest of Parliament. Everybody accepts that. The whole purpose of setting up a parliamentary Select Committee to deal with this matter is that its members would be within the barrier of secrecy and would not be able to tell us about it. We understand that. We vest responsibility in them. The difference is that it is not part of the Government, but part of parliamentary scrutiny. There is an inability to understand the distinction in this case.

Such a committee would concentrate the mind of the Home Secretary. He would have to go to discuss such matters with his fellow parliamentarians. There is nothing wrong with that system. It works extremely well in the United States, both in the Senate and in the House of Representatives. I urge the Prime Minister to think that it might be possible that she gets it wrong from time to time. Even if she is always right, she should allow us lesser mortals, who are wrong, occasionally to have some morsels from the table—some relief so that we can then have a little more trust in the Government. She should realise that we wish her well, but we are fed up with the feeling that only she has a monopoly of wisdom. She is not the only person to have held these secrets. She is not the only person to have had this difficulty of striking a balance between freedom and security. For goodness' sake, she should occasionally listen to some others.

Sir Barney Hayhoe (Brentford and Isleworth): Is there not a middle way, which would be to strengthen the Security Commission by the addition of some senior Privy Councillors from all parts of the House, so that that body might then carry through, substantially, the function that the right hon. Gentleman has in mind?

Dr. Owen: I have already implied that I would accept such a solution. It is not such a good solution, but already a number of those who make up the Security Commission are in the other place. Many of them could be members of it, but if the right hon. Gentleman wanted to make it extra-parliamentary, that would be one way. It would go at least some way to restoring the confidence of the House about the way in which it deals with such problems. It would also seem necessary to widen the remit of the Security Commission, because its remit means that it is brought in when the Government refer something to it. It does not have a continuing monitoring role, nor is it given overall charge of scrutiny.

The other aspects of the Bill all appear fairly sensible, but they are fairly small potatoes. It will be an advantage for people to be able to appeal against warrants if they believe, for example, that they have had their house burgled. The Bill will focus the Secretary of State's mind on the issue, so it is a modest step forward.

I end as I began. When we discuss this question of freedom, we must ask: what is our duty to the state? What is our duty to those people who, in one part of the United Kingdom, suffer daily from the fear of assassination? I thought it was appalling when a man who had simply provided electricity supplies to a police station was singled out to be killed. The IRA then told people that it was a warning for everyone else who was in any way associated with the police, such as builders.

Dr. Michael Clark: The man who was killed supplied building materials.

Dr. Owen: I thought that the man supplied electricity services, but the hon. Gentleman may be right.

However, it is outrageous that it is possible to say and do such things. The reason why the rule of silence has had to be slightly modified—although most people in the country believe it has been abandoned—is that it has become a terrorist technique never to give any form of statement. It has become incredibly difficult to bring people to justice. There is now a common belief among the Army and the police in Northern Ireland that there is hardly any point in apprehending people, as they will get away with it again.

If these restrictions are being introduced—and they should be done—is it not possible for the Prime Minister to listen to a few other people? Why not have three judges for the Diplock courts? It would do a great deal of good to strengthen the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It does not simply involve the people of the Republic. Many people in the House understand why trials have to be suspended and why many extra powers have to be taken, but believe it would be much more credible if the judgment were made by more than one judge. If the case goes to appeal, it goes to three judges. That is much more sensible. Perhaps later we could have mixed courts on both sides of the border when dealing with terrorist cases. If we are to encourage people to give us intelligence information freely and to co-operate completely, they must also have confidence in the judicial system on both sides of the border and in both minority and majority communities.

The Government have been careless about some basic freedoms. They have one last opportunity to restore confidence when the reform of the Official Secrets Act comes before the House. They should have listened to all those who have urged that there should be a public interest defence. The White Paper was phrased in such a way that no final decision was taken. It will be the yardstick upon which people will judge not just that Bill, but whether the Government are sensitive to the widely felt anxiety that they are trampling on basic freedoms.

Some of us who have not made historic judgments about the Government's record on freedom will nevertheless feel bruised and angry if that Bill comes before the House with no right to a public interest defence. I suggest that the Prime Minister reads Lord Griffiths' report in *The Observer v.* Others. It would be hard to find anyone more passionately committed to the Government's case for a complete silence in respect of anyone who has been employed in the security and intelligence services. I agree with most of what he says, in contrast with the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). Even that judge ends by stating that there is a strong case for a public interest defence. Let that be the litmus test by which the Government's respect for freedom will be judged.

5.3 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) made a thoughtful speech and I shall try to follow some of his interesting arguments about where the vital line should be drawn between freedom and security in our country today. I infinitely prefer his approach to some of the sloganising of megaphone opposition that we hear, when everything that is going on is denounced as a wild abuse of freedom.

Before I come to that part of the right hon. Gentleman's speech, I begin by welcoming the Gracious Speech. It is clear that we shall have an exceptionally busy Session. Sixteen major Bills have already been announced and, if previous Sessions are anything to go by, there will be several more to come. There is much for Conservative Members to welcome. The whole House can welcome measures such as the proposed legislation to protect children, and Conservative Members can warmly welcome some of the major economic measures, such as the massive privatisation of the electricity industry. Although there are some snags with the water legislation, and some environmental protection needs to be written into it, I support that measure, too.

In short, there is still plenty of momentum within the Government, but sometimes momentum has adverse consequences. On a day when we are debating Home Office affairs, I was a little surprised that the Home Secretary used the phrase "an essay in freedom" to describe his package of measures. He may come to regret that phrase, just as he will regret the phrase that he used when he introduced his White Paper on official secrets, referring to it as "an earthquake in Whitehall".

I admire my right hon. Friend's formidable energy. In some ways, he must be laying claim to being the most productive Home Secretary since Asquith, with three major Bills in this Session alone. However, when, with all that momentum, the Home Secretary makes his judgment

[Mr. Jonathan Aitken]

on where the delicate balance should be struck between freedom and security, I am not convinced that he is quite right. There is considerable scope in some of the Bills for radical amendments.

When I wonder why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has sometimes drawn the line in what I would regard as the wrong place, I believe that much of that is due to the somewhat malevolent influence of that Tasmanian figure that Her Majesty's Government would much rather forget, Mr. Peter Wright. When the day comes for my right hon. Friend's statue to be erected in the courtyard of the Home Office at Queen Anne's Gate, I rather hope that the sculptor concerned will have the sense of humour to erect in some small corner of the statue's purlieus a cheeky plastic gnome effigy of Mr. Wright complete with ocker hat and corks dangling from it.

The essay of freedom about which we have heard deserves a few black marks and almost all are directly attributable to Mr. Wright. For example, the reform of the Official Secrets Act is clearly, in one sense, a step in the right direction. It could hardly be anything else, given the discredited 1911 Act. However, why would a Government resist the prior publication defence if "Spycatcher" had not made a fool of the Law Officers' litigation for months and created a situation where one could buy "Spycatcher" in bookshops all over the world but could not buy it in this country?

Whoever heard of the doctrine of absolute, lifelong, eternal confidentiality until the Wright case came along? Whoever heard of the notion that a responsible BBC radio programme, such as "My Country, Right or Wrong", which contained measured contributions from former members of the security services about oversight bodies, parliamentary accountability and methods of communicating with Ministers, would by yanked off the air in a hail of writs and bans for months, before being reinstated without a single comma being taken out? Whoever would have heard of such steps if it had not been for the over-reaction to the Peter Wright case? There was a time when Ministers, even officials of the security services, could do as they can in the United States, and write policy articles and books which do not refer to operational matters, without all this hysterical reaction, provided that they cleared it and had it properly vetted. We should return to that position.

I deeply regret that the Government apparently propose to sweep away the vital section of the 1911 Act which made it an defence to leak or divulge a secret if one could prove that one had acted in the interests of the state. Those key words were the defence of many who were not prosecuted, such as civil servants who briefed Sir Winston Churchill shortly before the 1939 war about the lack of preparedness of Britain's aircraft defences. Those words were instrumental in ensuring that Mr. Duncan Sandys, who took similar patriotic action, was not prosecuted. They have provided a safeguard.

Whatever we call the defence—the public interest defence, the iniquity defence or the interests of the state defence—it is, as the right hon. Member for Devonport said, something of a litmus test of the Government's bad intentions to see it being chucked out of the window in such a cavalier manner.

Over-reaction to Peter Wright has damaged the Security Service Bill, which was brought before the House today. In one sense, the Bill is a good step forward. I am glad that the security services are being put on a proper statutory basis, and to that extent I welcome the Bill. Like the right hon. Member for Devonport, I spent part of the morning reading the majestic words and language of the Maxwell Fyfe directive and comparing it with the somewhat weasel words of the Bill. I was reminded of the contrast between Cranmer's English and some of the words of the alternative service book in the Anglican rite, but I must not get drawn into a theological discourse.

Leaving aside the Bill's wording, which needs much tidying up, the main flaw is the missing of a great opportunity. It will leave Britain as the only major democracy in the English-speaking world with no independent system of oversight of the security and intelligence services. The message of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was, in effect, "Trust me and the Prime Minister. Go on trusting me and the Prime Minister." I mean no disrespect to my right hon. Friends when I say that to trust busy Ministers to give the sort of thorough supervision and oversight of the security services that is needed is the triumph of hope over experience. We have heard before that ministerial supervision has been tightened and improved and will in future ensure that everything in the security services' garden is as efficient, effective and well-cultivated as possible.

I took the trouble today to remind myself of the last ministerial statement on the accountability to Ministers of the security services. It was delivered by the then Home Office Minister, Dr. Shirley Summerskill, on 28 July 1977. She made her statement against a background of unease, which was being expressed, about the efficiency and adequacy of the security services and the control of them. Dr. Summerskill said that it is

> "the tradition in this country . . . that the service is accountable to Ministers. Parliament accepts that the accountability must be to Ministers rather than to Parliament, and trusts Ministers to discharge that responsibility faithfully. There are arrangements—reviewed and further improved only last year—for giving effect to this accountability to Ministers. I am authorised to assure the House that on the basis of those arrangements my right hon. Friends are confident that the service concerned is carrying out its duties within the limits laid down in the directive to the Director-General issued by the then Home Secretary in September 1952 and which remains in force.
>
> My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary will continue to undertake a close oversight of the work of the Security Service".—[*Official Report*, 28 July 1977; Vol. 936, c. 1224.]

I heard that statement and I could not help feeling that something new was happening and that supervision and oversight of the security services were to be in firm and safe hands.

What happened? Dr. Summerskill's assurances were followed by a series of near-disasters. The Security Commission's report on the Bettaney case revealed a lamentable state of affairs in the management of the security services along with their procedures and accountability. When we consider the handling of the Blunt affair and the comic opera involving Peter Wright and supporting singers such as Chapman Pincher, we must surely come to the view that we need something better than the degree of supervision that can possibly be provided by any ministerial arrangements that involve those who bear the work load and carry the burdens of the modern Cabinet Minister.

Independent oversight is not merely a process for ensuring that security services do not get out of control. In some ways, that is the lesser of two problems because I believe that on the whole the Security Service does honourable, patriotic and effective work for the country. My worries are more concerned with its efficiency and judgment. Is it doing a good job in fighting terrorism? Is it allocating its substantial financial resources correctly between anti-terrorist activities and counter-intelligence? Does it have a good reputation within the country? On all these issues, independent oversight would be a tremendous force for good.

The United States Government have repeatedly shown that that is so. We should examine closely the record of the Senate and House committees and the work carried out by people such as Senator Malcolm Wallop and Senator Goldwater. Time and again, the United States security services were strengthened by independent oversight. Accordingly, I think that we are missing an opportunity. I am not convinced that our secret world is as effective as it could be. I think that outside constructive and patriotic voices would help.

The motto of the great Tory democrat Lord Randolph Churchill was "Trust the people". I am resentful that the Security Service Bill reflects no trust in the people's representatives in Parliament. It will not allow them any share in the future oversight of the security services. The suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that there would be enormous problems if Members, including Privy Councillors, were to go behind the barrier of secrecy does not stand up to serious practical examination. The Falklands committee, which considered all the intelligence details of that time, went behind the barrier. Among its members were distinguished Members of Parliament. There were no damaging leaks, troubles or sinister results. That is as good an example as any to show that parliamentarians—independent men of judgment—could play a much more serious role than that which they are invited to take on by the Bill, which, in effect, slams the door rather rudely on any sort of independent oversight of or involvement by Parliament with the security services.

In one important area I link Europe with the activities of the security services. Under the plans for the single market, which received only a glancing reference in the Gracious Speech, we are subject, among other things, to majority voting on the crucial issue of frontier control. As Britain has to deal more than any other member state with terrorism, the safeguarding of our frontiers is a crucial gut issue of national sovereignty that should be decided by Parliament in accordance with the wishes of a nation state that has daily to deal with the problems of terrorism.

It is an issue which was nobly highlighted by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in her Bruges speech, and I have been worried by the European reaction to the speech. It seems that almost every European leader, including Chancellor Khol and Mr. Rocard of France, has said, in effect, "We do not think much of this. We are on a completely different tack. We are on the tack of European federalism, of a united states of Europe." It seems that the attitude of European leaders is that the little deviations of my right hon. Friend will not matter very much in the great march of European new history towards the future.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Various interpretations have been placed by some of our European partners on the speech of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Bruges. I agree that my right hon. Friend did not speak against the concept of Europe as Conservative Members see it. Perhaps it did not help when, during the Conservative party conference, some delegates interpreted the Bruges speech as aggressive and antagonistic. Does my hon. Friend think that those comments caused others to think in that way?

Mr. Aitken: I am not sure to what extent the leaders of Europe read closely the small print of the report of the Conservative party conference, admirable though it is and exciting though the European debate was. My hon. Friend is right in one instance, however. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that there has been a negative reaction throughout the chancelleries of Europe as they used to be called, towards what many of us would regard as an admirable definition of the European ideal, which is a Europe of independent co-operating nation states.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Does my hon. Friend agree that confirmation of the excellence of the Prime Minister's Bruges speech has been given in the deep hostility with which our right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) greeted it?

Mr. Aitken: I believe that I have said enough about our right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) recently, but I have sympathy with the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow).

As I sit here, as an ordinary Back Bencher, watching European legislation over which we have no real scrutiny or control cascade into the House, I see parliamentary sovereignty eroding almost weekly. The newly elected hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) is in his place of Parliament. I can understand, at least, why some people in Scotland may now be asking themselves what point there is in United Kingdom nationhood, when we are seeing the powers of the mother of Parliaments—the United Kingdom Parliament—being eroded. No notice is being taken of the Bruges speech, and there is a steady shift in legislative authority to non-elected people in Brussels.

That is a real worry for the security of the union in the future, and I hope that there will still be time to check that drift. After all, we have an unwritten constitution and a system of government which have been in place for almost 900 years, whereas some of the European countries have constitutions which have changed half a dozen times or more this century. I believe that Germany has had five constitutions and the fifth republic of France is only 48 years old, and has had many a hasty predecessor.

I hope that when we look at the Gracious Speech carefully, we shall see in it also a warning by its light touch on Europe that something needs to be done to halt the drift of our parliamentary sovereignty away from the House to Brussels.

5.22 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): The debate is beginning to get to the central question, which is not the details of how we handle the security services or the official secrecy, but the constitutional relationships that are changed by the legislation that is to come before us. I believe that I am expressing an anxiety that goes far beyond the party of

[Mr. Tony Benn]

which I am a member about the evidence that has come to light regarding the threats to freedom by those who were supposed to defend it. Therefore, I consider that the proposals made by the Government in the Prime Minister's speech from the Throne are far from being evidence of liberation, and offer evidence of tightening up. We should look at that first.

There is no question whatsoever—I am not seeking to blame everybody in the security services—that there have been people working in high positions in MI5 and MI6, who have used the power vested in them under the so-called well-tried mechanisms of the Maxwell Fyfe directive to undermine political democracy in Britain.

Secondly, those people have done so outside any form of ministerial control. My right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) has been Home Secretary, and others in Governments of whom I have been a part have occupied that position, and I cannot believe that they knew what was going on. If they did not know what was going on, the Maxwell Fyfe directive was wholly ineffective in its operation—and I understand it is to be weakened in the new legislation.

Thirdly, when evidence of this behaviour came to light, far from the Government pursuing the law breakers for their law breaking, they pursued the man who described the law breaking for his description of it. A Government who purport to pursue a policy of law and order made no issue of the fact that in Mr. Peter Wright's book—after all, he was a serious and respected member of the intelligence services—he described crimes that were committed, and made no attempt to investigate those crimes or bring him to justice. His only offence was that he wrote about them.

Then, of course, we come up against the justification for their action, and that is where the constitutional areas become most important. Anyone who has read any of the histories on these matters will know that the security services do not feel in any way responsible to the Government of the day. They believe they are responsible to the Crown. They represent the Crown in order to deal with subversion. I shall try to define the Crown and subversion in a moment.

Two new elements have rightly been brought into the debate by the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), which must be put upon the record. First of all, the British security services are supervised completely by the American security services. I know that because I had responsibilities for many years for those areas that were a part of what was called the "special relationship". The Americans control our security services, supervise them, lay down the rules under which they operate, and warn them against people whom they regard as unreliable in Britain, because that is the condition upon which the United States makes nuclear weapons available to us.

The second threat—rather more shadowy but none the less real—is that, within a federal Europe, it is the intention of the Commission that security would be seen as a federal function, in part because the internal frontiers will cease to matter, and the Community will have to tackle what it defines as subversion on a federal basis.

The methods used by the security services must be set out. There is widespread vetting not only of civil servants, but, of course, of those in defence industries. The Clerk of the House and all the officials of the House are vetted by the security services. This was revealed in evidence submitted to the Committee of Privileges of which I am a member. That says a lot for the division between the legislature and the Executive, because the Executive vets the officials of the legislature. The BBC is vetted down to the level of anyone is involved in the preparation of current affairs or news. The research assistants of Members of Parliament are vetted. We know that from my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who brought the matter to the House.

The security services penetrate other services and actions of our national life. I shall give three examples. Cecil King, who purported to be a newspaper proprietor or a manager, was an agent of MI5, as was Tom Driberg, a former chairman of the Labour party. Lord Rothschild, who, when I worked closely with him, I took to be an industrialist brought in to help our think tank, was actually working for MI5 throughout that period.

Massive telephone interception and the opening of letters occur. Charles II nationalised the Post Office in 1660 because he wanted to see what people were writing to one another. Therefore, the Home Secretary is carrying on a good tradition in trying to intercept postal and telephone services and to legalise it. The Home Secretary is the most appropriate person to be moving the Bill, because when I tried to make a speech in 1976 in a church in his constituency at Burford to celebrate the Levellers, he wrote to the Secretary of State for Education and Science to get the grant for the Workers' Educational Association withdrawn. He is therefore consistent in his opposition to dissent in any century by anybody.

Mr. Hurd *rose*——

Mr. Benn: I have the correspondence.

Mr. Hurd: I remember inquiring 12 years ago why the taxpayers' money was being used to help the right hon. Gentleman support the Levellers in Burford.

Mr. Benn: The right hon. Gentleman, with the sort of naivety that adds to his charm, confesses to the charge that I laid against him, that when he heard I was to speak at a church in Burford about the Levellers, he wrote to the Secretary of State for Education and Science to try to bring pressure to bear so as to withdraw a grant from the WEA that had invited me. He has confirmed my argument, and he is consistent. He does not believe in dissent in any century, including the present one.

The other area in which the security services have operated is in redefining subversion. There is no doubt that the phrase that became popular during the miners' strike of "the enemy within" had been defined much earlier by the security services. The enemy within includes the trade union movement and many members of the Labour party and peace movement. That definition was undoubtedly one of the factors that led to the attempt to destroy Harold Wilson. In my opinion, it was also used, but for different reasons, to remove the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), because the security services thought that he was too weak.

The methods used by the security services include the collection of damaging information and fabricating misinformation—as with the forging of Ted Short's bank account, which was leaked to Chapman Pincher. So much for lifelong confidentiality, when the security services regularly use certain journalists to feed out damaging information to destroy people they do not like. One cannot overlook the fact that Peter Wright confirmed Anthony Nutting's claim that Sir Anthony Eden ordered the assassination of another head of state, President Nasser. Anthony Nutting confirmed on television what Wright had written.

The question one must now ask is, what safeguards will there be under the new Act? Supposing Ted Short, as Lord President, had appealed to discover whether his bank account had been forged, to whom would his appeal have gone? Would it have gone to the Cabinet? No. Would it have gone to the Prime Minister? No. It would have gone to a commissioner appointed for the purpose by a previous Government.

When Bruce Kent's telephone was tapped, what safeguards would have existed then? If he had written to whoever it may have been and asked, "Is my phone being tapped?", the only answer he would have received was not whether his phone was being tapped but whether the security services were abusing their rights—and those rights are covered by warrant and by a commission. The victims do not know what is being done to them, and the perpetrators do not wish to make complaints that might reveal the crimes they are perpetrating. The exceptions are one or two people such as Clive Ponting and Cathy Massiter, who were moved by their consciences, to act.

I turn to the matter of lifelong confidentiality to the Crown, which presumably should have bound Peter Wright. Who is the Crown? Did the Queen tell Peter Wright to try to destroy the Prime Minister? Obviously not. Did the Prime Minister tell Peter Wright to destroy himself? Obviously not. Did the Home Secretary tell Peter Wright to try to destroy the Government? Obviously not. The Crown is the code name we use for those central areas of Government in defence, intelligence and international relations—a state within the state—that the Government, and, I regret to say, previous Governments, did not wish to be subject to parliamentary scrutiny or discussion. The Crown is a term used to cover a concrete emplacement surrounded by barbed wire that the Home Secretary thinks needs fresh protection. It is not that he intends it to be subject to public scrutiny.

I asked the Home Secretary whether Ministers, who, after all, are Crown servants, will be covered by the new rules. It will be difficult to bind the Prime Minister to lifelong confidentiality as Bernard Ingham, on her instruction, breaches it at 11 o'clock every morning for the benefit of selected lobby correspondents who never make clear what has gone on. Are we really saying that anyone who is elected to Parliament, who becomes a Minister and discovers things he believes that it is in the public interest should be made known, will be bound to confidentiality for life? Or will anybody else? I have cited Ministers as they are uniquely accountable to those who elect them.

The reality is that there is nothing different about security. In its proper sense, security is part of the country's defence forces, and no one denies that the country needs defence forces. But contrast the way security is treated with the other parts of the defence forces. Every year Parliament debates defence policy, but it never debates security policy—I am not talking about security operations. Parliament never discusses the definition of a subversive person—which is currently based on a phrase written years ago by a civil servant for Lord Harris in the House of Lords. We have never discussed whether as a Parliament we believe that being a member of CND makes a person subversive. That was decided by the Ministry of Defence, which told Cathy Massiter to bug Bruce Kent.

Parliament debates defence policy and votes a budget for the country's defence establishment. It does not know the budget of the security establishment. Parliament knows the Chiefs of the Defence Staff and can ask parliamentary questions about defence matters. The issue is only confused by those who say that we cannot be told about individual security operations. Of course nobody wants to know a rumour that a bomber is coming to London. We do not want a parliamentary question that leads to the Minister responsible replying, "We think that a bomber is staying at a Bayswater hotel." That is not the point at issue. The question is whether a state within the state, employing people with no feeling of responsibility to the Government elected by the people of this country, can continue as it is.

The Government wish to conceal information because that suits their book. I dare say that all Governments will want to conceal information—*[Interruption.]* It is not my purpose to make a party point. I hope that hon. Members will give me some credit. I am trying to raise a matter that is of equal concern in all parts of the House and to every elector. It would not alter matters very much if my right hon. and hon. Friends were occupying the Government Benches and those of hon. Gentlemen were seated on the Opposition Benches. I am clear about that. If hon. Gentlemen will look at the record, they will find that, as a Cabinet Minister, I raised the same questions on the Labour party's national executive and submitted a memorandum that warned of the dangers. That was 10 years ago.

When one considers that the Government sent in the police to remove the Zircon film, and the prosecutions of Tisdall and Ponting, one realises that the real conflict concerns both sides of the House and those who elect us. We have heard much about the oxygen of publicity for Sinn Fein. Democracy lives by the oxygen of information. If one cuts off the oxygen of information and releases instead the poisonous gas of secrecy, misinformation and news management, one destroys the basis on which this House safeguards our people. The House of Commons is the real guarantor of the liberties of the people, not those individuals in little offices who have their own ideas about who is subversive and who engage in bugging, blackmailing and in destroying the reputations of those whom they do not like.

Democracy's second safeguard is conscience. There is no substitute in law, administrative action or court ruling for the person, be they man or woman, who says, "What is being done is wrong and I shall speak my mind and take the consequences." If one removes the safeguard of conscience from people who, in the course of their work, may come across something they feel it would be in the public interest to divulge—whether one gaols them, punishes them, or makes them into public villains—they would only be doing what we told the Germans at the Nuremberg trials they should have done, which was to disregard unjust orders—[HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] Of course that is what the Nuremberg trials were all about.

Parliament must protect these principles. In many ways I share the view of the hon. Member for Thanet, South. Next week I shall have been here 38 years. I have never known a House of Commons that has been so craven in surrendering one of its rights after another—surrendering

[Mr. Benn]

powers to the EEC, accepting 120 foreign bases, and now, in the name of security, handing over even greater powers to the Executive. If we do not stand up here and now it will be too late——

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I am approaching my last sentence.

We must make a stand here and now or we shall find that, in the name of freedom, we are surrendering our liberties.

5.41 pm

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): These six days when we consider the Government's programme are a proper time in which to consider the direction in which we are headed. I do not wish to take up matters that are far above me and have to do with what is right, whether Wright was right or wrong, and so on. I want to bring the debate on home affairs down to a much more genuinely homely level.

Although the issues that have been mentioned by many of my peers are of great importance, most important of all are the policies that affect the great majority of people in the country, and especially those that affect low achievers and the unfortunate. It is not that the Government do not want to help people who need help most, but individual private hells can frequently be built out of the Government's best intentions. Many of the policies advanced as being for the good of the people confront enormous stumbling blocks.

In 1901, there were only 50,000 people over the age of 80 in this country; now, there are more than 680,000. By the year 2000 there will be almost 1 million people over 80. At present, 2·4 people have to earn the retirement benefits that we pay to each retired person. Within the life of two Parliaments that figure will drop to 1·8 people per retired person. If I am spared, by the time I reach 70 only about 1·4 people will have to earn each retired person's benefits.

Whether or not the Chancellor of the Exchequer was quoted correctly recently, we must consider the future of the benefits that we give people. If targeting is to be useful we must recognise that it is better to give one genuinely needy person a square meal than to give many others a biscuit. Some people do not need help. I hope that my mother and mother-in-law will forgive me for saying that they do not need help, yet they can get almost as much help as people in genuine need.

If the Government's intentions are good, as I believe they are—if I did not, I would not be a member of this party, and proud to be so—we must ask how and whether targeting is going to work. It is obvious that it is not working now.

I want to tell the House about two cases that came to my notice in last Friday's advice bureau. The first concerns a man in a Cheshire home who is dying of multiple sclerosis. His wife has five children and was told that under the new system she will receive £58 a week with which to look after them, instead of £89. That is £31 a week less. The DSS advised her that it could give her a lot more money if only she would obtain a legal separation from her husband. That was not the Government's intention, I am sure, but it shows that the system is not targeted aright.

The second case was that of a low achiever—I hope that he will forgive me for calling him that—who looks after his mother, who suffers from epilepsy and arthritis. Under the new system he gets £21 a week instead of £57. It will take six months for an appeal to be heard. I do not believe that that was the Government's intention, either, but whatever caused it cannot be right.

I was one of those who praised the old DHSS for saving about £500 million by catching twisters. Twisters are leeches on society, whether they come from the City or twist benefits which should belong to others. I agree that there need to be changes if we are to target money properly; and I shall suggest three things that need to be done.

We should not do the least that we can and shovel these matters under the carpet. Luckily for some of us, society is composed of people who achieve and are fortunate, but it also consists of low achievers and of those who live in the grey, depressing valley of misfortune. We must make up our minds whether we want to help such people because we must or because we think that we should.

What the Government have done best has been to make this a more successful and high achieving society; the question now is what to do with the achievements. All hon. Members who represent city constituencies know of many people who could obtain benefits if they could afford to take solicitors or accountants with them to the DSS. But if they could afford them, they would not need the DSS.

As I have said, the Government need to do three important things. With the £500 million that we have rightly saved from the twisters, we should increase the staff of the DSS who deal with attendance allowances, community care, housing benefits and family credit. The problem is that in Birmingham, for example, only 8 per cent. of the community care budget has been taken up. That is not what the Government intended. As I have said already, good intentions are not enough. It is what we do that matters.

Secondly, as a caring people, we should give more funding to the citizens advice bureaux. Anybody who knows them, as I do in my city, realises that they do a tremendous amount of voluntary work in helping people to claim benefits that are their right and in helping them with their problems.

Thirdly, if we have advertising campaigns about AIDS or to recruit people to various organisations, would it not be right to have a genuine, forthright and helpful advertising campaign so that people know not what they can abuse, but what they can rightly claim to help them with their problems? We should not be pleased that benefits are costing us a few hundred million pounds less, if that has come about not because we have stopped people twisting the system—which we are right to do—but because people do not receive the benefits that are their right.

In the main, we are a prosperous and successful society and it is true that the majority of pensioners are well off. However, if it were true that 90 or 95 per cent. of our people were well off, the army of people who were not well off would be bigger than the army that fought the second world war. As a prosperous and caring society, it is our duty to ensure that the Government and the people want to help those who are unfortunate and who are in need, but who are not getting benefits. If we do not do that, we shall not have the right to call ourselves a civilised society.

That is why I want the Government to adopt my three proposals: more staff in benefit offices to ensure that people receive what they should, more funding for citizens advice bureaux, which do so much on a voluntary basis, and an advertising campaign to ensure that people know what they should receive, not as charity but as a right. It is our duty to ensure that they receive those rights and benefits.

5.53 pm

Mr. James Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): My first duty in making my first speech in this Parliament is to express my deep appreciation to the people of Glasgow, Govan, not so much for sending me here—that is a mixed blessing—but for putting Scotland back on the political agenda. That is germane to some of the points made this afternoon. I have no doubt that the Special Branch is now reactivating its files on the Scottish question and that section F of MI5 will have to dust down one or two files as well. I look forward to the Committee stage of the Bill concerning official secrets and to seeing how the Home Secretary defines political neutrality and how he defines people who are a danger to the institutions of the British state. I suspect that he will place us in both categories.

My second duty—and a welcome one—is to pay a genuine tribute to my predecessor, Bruce Millan. When I was in the Labour party with him, he was on the Right wing and I was on the Left wing and there were a number of occasions when we did not agree on policy and other matters. However, I have always had enormous respect for his abilities. When he was Minister of State under Willie Ross, he was probably the best Minister of State at the Scottish Office that we have ever had. He was greatly respected by civil servants, not because he was a Minister who was easily manipulated, but because he was a Minister in total charge of his Department. He was perfectly capable of conceiving and executing policy.

When he was Secretary of State for Scotland—I do not want to do him any disfavour—he was not the greatest Secretary of State that Scotland has had. That was probably Tom Johnston. However, Bruce Millan was an excellent innovator and executor of policy. It was pure accident that on the day on which I heard he had been appointed a Commissioner in Brussels I wrote him a personal letter to say how delighted I was, without any indication that I would be a candidate in Govan. Bruce Millan's talent and ability will be brought to bear on the Commission for the benefit not only of the people of Scotland, but of the people of Europe. I am glad to have the opportunity to pay him a personal tribute.

I shall now talk about my constituency. If one reads some of the English newspapers, one may have a total misconception about the make-up of the constituency. It is a diverse constituency and contains a good cross-section of the west of Scotland community. However, despite its diversity, it has common anxieties, the major one of which is about youth unemployment. The next anxiety is about the association of drug abuse with youth unemployment.

I must tell the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland that some of my constituents find it almost impossible to understand the obsession with tapping the telephones of trade unionists who are going about their ordinary business, whereas the drug barons can get away with a great deal. They wonder why the drug barons' telephones are not being tapped to the same extent as trade unionists' telephones.

There is also continuing anxiety among all my constituents about the Southern General hospital and particularly about the nurses there. I shall not devote the whole of my speech to that, but I can assure the Secretary of State for Scotland that all Opposition Members are disturbed by newspaper reports this morning that a macho attitude is being adopted by the board and management of the Greater Glasgow health board to those nurses who are correctly protesting about grading. I have never found morale in a caring service as low as that at the Southern General hospital since the firemen went on strike in the late 1970s. The Secretary of State should tell the Greater Glasgow health board that the management needs a great deal of sensitivity to understand the pain and humiliation felt by the nurses over the grading exercise.

I have said that my constituency has common anxieties and that, although it is diverse, it has a common characteristic. Each area of my constituency has a great sense of community and has produced very capable leadership at community level. That characteristic of community concern and care was one of the signal factors in the total rejection and humiliation of Thatcherite policies, which the Tory candidate put forward clearly during the by-election campaign.

When I listened to the Prime Minister yesterday, it became clear that she was totally divorced from reality. One of my constituents described her as being drunk with power. The Prime Minister commands the Cabinet, the Tory party and, unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition, on frequent occasions. She is not superhuman, but the opposition to her has been so poor that she appears to be a great deal more capable than she is. I shall quote from her speech yesterday—*[Interruption.]* I have found the quotation without goading or help from hon. Members. The Prime Minister said:

> "The Gracious Speech makes clear the Government's determination to hold to firm and successful economic policies. We shall continue to bear down on inflation, to keep firm control of public spending and to promote enterprise. Those are the policies that have brought a period of unparalleled prosperity to the British people—prosperity that has been shared by all income groups."—*[Official Report*, 22 November 1988; Vol. 142, c. 21.]

That is the Prime Minister's view of various parts of the United Kingdom. The reality is different in Scotland, and I am sure that it is different in other parts of the United Kingdom as well.

I am indebted to the Labour party for having produced, during the by-election campaign, a document entitled "The State of the Nation" which measures exactly what has happened to our country since the Prime Minister came to power in 1979. According to that document, homelessness has doubled. Annual house building has decreased from 9,000 new starts to 4,000. National Health Service beds have been cut by 3,000. Unemployment is up by 85 per cent., and one third of manufacturing jobs have been lost. In addition, 18,000 teenagers have lost income support because of social security cuts, and the number of Scots whose supply has been cut off by British Gas because they were unable to pay their bill has increased by 20 per cent. That is Scotland under the rule of the Thatcher Government—a long way from the right hon. Lady's claim that all people have enjoyed additional prosperity under her Government.

[Mr. James Sillars]

About a third of the Scottish population is living in poverty. The cost of Thatcherism in human terms has been deep pain to thousands—indeed millions—of families in Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom. Lives have been blighted by the operation of Thatcherism. Young people have been denied hope. One of the sad features of the weeks leading up to the by-election was the withdrawal by the Leader of the Opposition of the accusation that the Government had cheated on YTS. He should have continued to argue that case against the Prime Minister, and I shall tell the House why.

Four thousand young people in Glasgow have been cheated. They were promised that they would get job opportunities, but instead they have been made penniless. In the middle of the by-election campaign, we heard statements from the social work department. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the Tories are proud of the effect of their policies. The social work department, which is not given to extreme statements, explained that girls would be driven on to the streets and into prostitution, and young men into theft—the only way in which to put money in their pockets. Those young people have been cheated. Those are the fruits of Thatcherism in my country, and that is why the Tories were so completely humiliated in the election.

To Scotland, Thatcherism is an alien set of concepts and values. It is a philosophy driven by greed and self-interest, and it is a great tragedy for the people of England that it seems to have taken such root in the south-east, where so much of the political power now lies. I hope—it is a genuine hope—that the Labour party in England will reassess the attitudes that it has adopted in the past four or five years and understand that it has no hope of gaining Tory votes in the south-east of England by advocating a watered down form of Toryism. If Socialism is to advance, in the south-east of England and elsewhere, it must be by the moral conversion of people to its principles. That is the only hope for the Labour party.

Scotland rejects the values of Thatcherism because our country has a philosophy of egalitarianism. Unlike the Prime Minister, we also believe in the community. We believe that people have a responsibility to the community but also that the community has a responsibility to people. That is perhaps best summed up in the words of Robert Burns:

"Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman;
Tho' they may gang a Kennin wrang,
To step aside is human."

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Speak English.

Mr. Sillars: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman should say that. There is the implied arrogant assumption in his remark that only in his language can ideas be expressed eloquently. I have heard such quasi-racist statements from the Conservative Benches during broadcasts of Scottish Question Time.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Stupid.

Mr. Sillars: My hon. Friend says that that is stupid, but I think that it goes deeper than that, when hon. Members tell us to speak English rather than speak in the tongue of a man known internationally—a man who wrote "Auld Lang Syne," a hymn that is sung everywhere. Every Scot will feel the implied insult in the hon. Gentleman's remark.

We Scots are in this place only temporarily. Given that we have an entirely different set of values from those of the Prime Minister and her acolytes—a superior set of values —*[Interruption.]* It is quite easily proven. There is no way that the Scottish community would ever sit back and let young people be treated as they are at present in YTS and outside it. The Scottish people would never allow their education system to be attacked and broken up as the Government intend. Our values are better than the values of the Prime Minister, and the proof is that we have a much better society than the society that she has managed to create down here.

How should we combat Thatcherism in the immediate future? We cannot sit back and wait to see what happens in the next four years. Since the day and hour of the Govan by-election result, there has been no crowing by members of the Scottish National party. We have sought to rub no salt in any wounds because we believe that there should be a united opposition to specific parts of the Government's programme during this Session and this Parliament. I would highlight the opting-out legislation in that respect. Nothing divides us on that subject. The 62 Scottish Opposition Members unanimously defend the Scottish education system and oppose that legislation. The people of Scotland are perfectly entitled to expect us to co-operate and to use the rules of this institution to prevent it.

Let me deal with the longer term. First, I place on record my party's position on Scottish independence in the European Community. The self-styled governor-general of Scotland—Governor-General Rifkind—told us in a frenetic speech at a Tory party seminar the other day that Scotland is much more influential and politically powerful with the United Kingdom representing its interests in the Community. I do not think that he can tell that to the folk of the highlands and islands who are trying to extricate themselves from a situation that he should never have allowed to arise.

There is a fundamental difference between what Scotland is and what Scotland would be if it were independent within the Community. The Secretary of State for Scotland is a placeman. He has no power base in the Tory party in Scotland and he does not command his position from his own power base. Unlike the Home Secretary and one or two other folk in the Cabinet, the Secretary of State for Scotland does not represent a power base inside the Tory party that even the Prime Minister cannot overlook. He is a placeman and he has no power of veto. He can resign only if he does not like certain policies, only to be replaced by the Under-Secretary of State—the chap sitting next to him—who would be much more congenial company for the Prime Minister.

Just before the by-election, the Secretary of State was boasting that Scotland was well represented in the Community. There have been 26 summit meetings in the European Community since Thatcher came to power and the Secretary of State for Scotland has never even managed to get on the aeroplane, let alone got into the door.

If Scotland were an independent member of the European Community, its power and influence would be entirely different. It would take its turn, as do all member states, as president of the European Community. It would set the agenda. That is not an uninfluential role. It would represent the Community in its dealings with the international community. There will be many developments after 1992 and the creation of the single market. Further amendments will be required to the treaty and they will have to be ratified unanimously.

The Single European Act does not remove the veto over national interests. Instead of the Secretary of State for Scotland lobbying inside the Cabinet, with no power base and no sanction, Scotland would have a Government with the sanction of the veto. Parliamentary representation would be doubled. Instead of Bruce Millan having a term of only four years—it is a happy accident that a Scot is now a Commissioner—there would be a permanent Scottish Commissioner whose influence on many policies would be permanent.

It should interest the right hon. and learned Gentleman, because he is a Scottish lawyer, that there is great concern about the future of Scottish law; we have struggled hard to prevent it from being anglicised and taken over piece by piece. Scottish law would benefit enormously if Scotland had a permament place in the European Court of Justice. Independence would also benefit Scotland at home, as well as in Europe.

Mr. Maclennan: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has not overlooked the pivotal role of Lord Stuart—a Scottish judge who has presided over the European Court of Justice for some time.

Mr. Sillars: Yes, I know that, but the hon. Gentleman has strengthened my case, because Lord Stuart is no longer a Member of the European Court of Justice. If Scotland were an independent state within the European Community, there would be a permanent Scottish legal representative sitting as a judge in the European Court of Justice. It would not happen—as with Bruce Millan—once every three or four times.

We should have as much power over our domestic affairs as this Government have over us now. A Scottish Government within the European Community would exercise full control at home. There would be no return to private landlords. No old folks would go cold. No young folk would be cheated on YTS. There would be no privatisation of electricity and the other utilities. There would be no privatisation of the National Health Service. There would be no student loans, and there would be no attack on Scottish education institutions and Scottish universities. In a Scotland that was independent within Europe we should shape our own lives and our social and economic policies at home. We should also safeguard our interests in the wider European forum,

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sillars: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Porter *rose*——

Mr. Sillars: After Govan, the debate has started for real in Scotland. After what happened in 1979, many people thought that Scottish nationalism had reached its peak. It took a long time for the Scottish people to recover from the effects of 1979, but Govan has put that issue clearly back on the agenda. We believe that there is an unassailable case for Scottish independence in Europe

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sillars: Yes, I shall certainly give way to this hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Home Robertson: I accept everything that the hon. Gentleman has said about the constitutional crisis that is being provoked by the Secretary of State for Scotland, but does he seriously believe that the majority of the people of Scotland or even of Govan really want independence and to break away from our partners south of the border?

Mr. Sillars: The hon. Gentleman will have to update his vocabulary. This is not 1977 or 1978; this is 1988. We are referring to Scotland within the European dimension. All the emotive old phrases about a break-up and a rupture do not arise. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) is the last person to refer to what happened in the past. He was converted to devolution when it suited him.

The European dimension does away with the old arguments about break-up and separation. We are referring to a redefinition of partnership, and that is entirely different. Under the Single European Act, there will be no borders in 1992. Trading relations will continue and the process of integration will accelerate. Within the European Community, Scotland would be elevated from a province of Thatcher's England to a full member state of the European Community.

Mr. Barry Porter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sillars: No, I do not intend to give way.

Mr. Porter: Why not?

Mr. Sillars: I have no intention of giving way.

Mr. Porter: But the hon. Gentleman has given way to Scottish Members.

Mr. Sillars: Yes, of course I give way to Scottish Members.

There is a fundamental difference between the Scottish National party—and the other non-Unionist parties, I was going to say, but that is not correct because the Labour party is still a Unionist party. The big difference between the Labour party, the Democrats and our party is that they keep telling the Scottish people what they cannot do. We keep telling the Scottish people what they can do.

I end by quoting from Professor Smout's book, "A Century of the Scottish People." He says:

> "by the exercise of political will, the people hold their own future in their own hands, and in the last analysis, no one can be blamed for our predicament but ourselves."

We can be blamed for our predicament immediately after 1979. We did not do it last time. The Scottish people will do it next time.

Mr. Barry Porter: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) to say that he will give way only to Scottish Members, or is it right and proper that he should at least consider giving way to hon. Members from the United Kingdom in general? It seems to me that it is quite wrong for the hon. Gentleman to make distinctions of that nature.

Mr. Speaker: It is a matter for the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars). The hon. Member for

[Mr. Speaker]

Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) has been a Member of this House for a long time. He knows that the hon. Member who is on his feet gives way to whomsoever he wishes.

6.18 pm

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) on his political re-entry into the House of Commons. It was not perhaps the softest of political re-entries, but no doubt the impact of his landing will be felt on the Benches on both sides of the House, as will the impact of his future speeches. He returned here with a reputation and he has not disappointed the House. All of us, whatever he has to offer us in the future, will listen with interest to him and to the style in which he says it.

I intend to refer to the part of the Gracious Speech that deals with the Government's intention vigorously to

"pursue their policies for reducing crime".

All of us are concerned about crime. No matter who we are, our families, friends, homes and property are all at risk from crime. The blip in the 30-year rise in the crime statistics is welcome. I am sure that every hon. Member wants in his heart to be generous and to say that that is good news, but there is no room for complacency.

The Government are to be congratulated on their attack on crime and on their campaigns to bring home the need for us to tackle crime individually as well as a society. That is welcome. They have introduced tougher sentences for crimes that demand tough sentences and implemented a realistic sentencing policy which enables criminals to be punished in the community, allowing them to repay their debt to society and to those whom they have attacked or offended. Such schemes have struggled forward in my constituency and elsewhere and they are to be welcomed.

As many publications issued by the Home Office state, much crime is committed because there are easy opportunities to commit it. It is neither professional nor carefully planned. There are many ways in which individuals can reduce crime. At the simplest level, advice in the pamphlet "Practical ways to crack crime" reminds us that we should lock doors and windows and avoid obviously dangerous places. Sound advice is given through neighbourhood watch schemes, of which there are several successful examples in my constituency. I live in such an area. The people involved are grateful for the support that the Government have given to help them protect themselves rather than always look to others to do it for them.

I am pleased that you are in the Chair, Mr. Speaker. We noted the encouragement that you gave recently to younger citizens to take citizenship responsibly. Neighbourhood watch schemes and others such as those with which you have been associated will play a fundamental part in reawakening people to what they can do to help themselves.

In their campaigns, the Government have rightly said that much can be done to reduce crime. I should like to concentrate on improved lighting, which helps to reduce crime. It also reduces fear of crime significantly. The Home Office pamphlet, "Cracking down on Crime" depicts a built-up area with no street lights. I hope that that is just a drafting error. There is much that we can do to improve lighting at relatively little cost. I am not asking for a major public spending programme; I am sure that I would be criticised if I did. Small amounts of money well targeted can make all environments safer places.

I am joint chairman of the all-party parliamentary lighting group—a role I share happily with the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who I am pleased to see in his place. The group takes an interest in the British lighting industry, although not only because we happen to represent areas where lighting manufacturers are to be found. Nevertheless, we have strong constituency interests in that respect and I am pleased to say that the light-manufacturing industry is a healthy part of the British economy.

The group is also interested in what can be done with the industry's products. We have conducted campaigns which are intended to improve the standards of living. We noted poor motorway lighting. Our campaign was well received and is partly responsible for the improved quality and quantity of motorway lighting. We also have views about the poor response of some Government Departments to our campaign urging an improvement in lighting efficiency. Perhaps I can trespass into the Home Department in that respect.

Perhaps it is not surprising that, as joint chairman of the all-party lighting group, I managed to get members of the lighting industry and my local authority of Enfield together to fund an experiment to discover whether better lighting reduces crime. Thorn-EMI was happy to co-operate with an experiment conducted by the Middlesex polytechnic centre for criminology and police studies in my constituency. It seemed to us that better lighting would reduce crime, but one cannot rely on a bright idea—it has to be tested. The results were encouraging. We found an 80 per cent. reduction in the incidence and fear of violent street crime.

In a survey conducted during the six weeks before we improved lighting conditions, we found a high level of physical attacks on my constituents and a high level of fear of attack. The figures were much higher than those recorded by the local police. Fear is not often reported. The same is true of verbal abuse and of threatening behaviour, and some personal attacks are not reported.

We found that one in 10 of my constituents had been victims of robbery or attack in the 12 months before the survey and that one in five had been verbally abused or threatened. It will not surprise the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) that nine out of 10 women feared assault at night and that 50 per cent. of them were frightened of—and avoided—going out in the dark because of the poor conditions.

After we had improved the brightness of lighting by a minimum of 500 per cent., four out of five respondents said that their fear had been reduced. In the six weeks following the change, there were no attacks and only two auto crimes, compared with 12 in the previously surveyed period. Moreover, there was only one robbery whereas there had been five previously.

It was gratifying to get the response that we hoped for. Some 83 per cent. of the women interviewed volunteered the information that they had noticed an improvement in lighting. It is interesting that 62 per cent. of men noticed an improvement. Not many men admit to being afraid, but I suspect that many of us are apprehensive when we go down dark alleyways. Some 62 per cent. of respondents reported feeling safer and more than 80 per cent. of them said that that was the result of better lighting. Those were the findings of a fairly good scientific survey, although the sample was small. I have reasonable confidence in the results.

Anecdotal evidence is not enough, but I went to a shop in Lambeth the day after I appeared on the BBC "Today" programme talking about the experiment.

Mr. John Patten: It was a very good performance.

Dr. Twinn: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for that comment.

Mr. Patten: It cheered us all up.

Dr. Twinn: It cheered up the owner of the shop as well. His street had been free of crime, but the night before the programme the street lights failed. One woman was physically attacked and a shop window was smashed by vandals. Even improved lighting might fail sometimes—although I hope not if it is produced by Thorn-EMI in my constituency or perhaps by Philips in Hamilton—but that shows what can happen when lighting fails.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) and to Steve Norris, our former hon. Friend, who has been heading Crime Concern, on the good work that he has been doing. They have listened very carefully and, I hope sympathetically, to the results of our survey which are good news for fighting crime. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier) has also been kind enough to endorse the advice of our all-party parliamentary group to local authorities encouraging them to install better lighting.

I have no doubts about the validity of the results. In statistical terms there is only a 2 per cent. chance that they could have occurred by random chance had we not improved the lighting. Therefore, it is right for us to ask the Government to adopt the results and promote better lighting to tackle crime. However, if the Government feel that wider surveys are necessary, I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will find on his desk soon —if he has not already—a fairly weighty document, which sets out a detailed survey which could be conducted to test our findings further in wider areas of the country.

Hon. Members might like to know that the expense of the Edmonton experiment was borne by the local council. Although the council never ceases to tell me almost weekly in its letters to me how hard pressed it is for cash, and that despite being a Conservative authority it has been frightened of being rate-capped, it found the money because the amount was not particularly high. It had to find £1,617 from its budget to provide that security in an undoubted blackspot in my constituency. I suspect that it will be able to recoup some of that money in revenue costs from the greater efficiency of the new lighting.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I give my partisan support to the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) who is making a formidable case in the presence of the Minister, which I hope will have a sizeable effect on his next well-publicised campaign. Will he also emphasise to the Minister the cost-effective benefits that are involved? Value for money is one of the Government's catchphrases. If local authorities invest in new, better, high technology lighting, it will not cost them more, but, as the hon. Gentleman has pointed out, will save them money even in the short term. One would expect that that would appeal to someone as wet around the edges as the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) who is never slow to pick up a good issue when he sees it. This is one of the best issues around.

Dr. Twinn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his prompting, although I wonder whether he has not gone slightly over the top.

The results of the survey demonstrate cost-effectiveness, not simply in the recouping of electricity costs. With better lighting, vandalism and damage to council property is reduced and police time is saved. I am not sure that one can put a cost on the reduction of fear in society, particularly among women who are afraid of going out. If we improve the lighting, more people will go out in the evenings and that in itself will act as a deterrent against physical attacks because there will be more people around. People will feel safer and happier and if attacks do take place there will be more witnesses so that those who are guilty, who are often known in the community, can be reprehended and taken to court.

I recommend the results of our survey to all hon. Members, whether their constituencies are in rural areas, county towns or inner cities. The problems exist everywhere and our findings bear that out. I hope that the Government will endorse our findings, vigorously pursue policies to reduce crime and improve lighting which is one of the most vigorous and cost-effective ways in which that can be done.

6.34 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland). The two previous speeches have reversed the normal order of things. The speech of the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) was perhaps one of the most uncontroversial in this debate and that of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars), which in some respects can be regarded as a maiden speech, was one of the more controversial speeches. The hon. Member for Edmonton was giving voice to the dictum fiat lux. That would be a suitable motto for the House of Commons. The hon. Member for Govan almost overlooked the fact that he was making a kind of maiden speech, because his speech was more a call to arms or a return to the scene of battle. I dare say that we all look forward to hearing from him again on many occasions, doubtless repeating the same themes.

At the beginning of this 10th year of consecutive Conservative Administrations, the Gracious Speech provides the House with the opportunity to take stock and review what in the United States of America might be called the state of the Union. There are times when the metropolitan preoccupations of Ministers seem astonishingly out of touch with the pressures of resentment and hostility that are building up in the nations and regions of the United Kingdom.

It is an appropriate debate to say clearly to the Government that the state of the Union is most unhealthy. The people of Northern Ireland are being governed virtually by edict. There is deterioration in the security situation in Northern Ireland. The rules of law that we have cherished in Parliament are giving place to abnormal measures. The Gracious Speech contains provisions dealing with the prevention of terrorism, putting on hold provisions which we would have wished to regard as highly abnormal in a civilised democracy which is attached to the rule of law.

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

The people of Scotland are greatly discontented. The Secretary of State for Scotland behaves rather like a satrap in the later stages of the Turkish empire, more anxious to please the Sultan than to recognise and remedy the discontents around him.

The Gracious Speech and the manner in which it was introduced by the Prime Minister give little hint of those discontents. Many, if not most, of the commentators on the legislative programme have observed the assertive ascendency of the Government in proposing further privatisation of the public utilities, water and electricity. They rightly see those measures as a statement of the Government's continuing ideological commitment and having little to do with the environment or consumer choice. We Democrats view the expansion of choice as a social and economic imperative, but we view with complete scepticism and incredulity the assertion that choice will flow from the privatisation measures.

However, as well as the economic triumphalism of the Government, there is discernible in the legislative programme another theme on which the Opposition have chosen to focus. It is the strengthening of central Government power at the expense of individual and community freedoms. That is not new under this Government nor is it dramatic, but the continuing drip of legislation is corroding democracy.

The new programme, like others before it, further curtails local government discretion over expenditure. In this case it affects especially the revenues from rates and rents. The programme moves towards the permanent establishment of abnormal Executive powers to deal with terrorism. It proposes placing a restriction on public admission to football matches and proposes to gag those connected with the intelligence and security services. The programme seeks to insulate the Security Service from parliamentary supervision. In Scotland, the Government propose legislation to transfer the financing of schools from local authorities to central Government and propose a system of education aping that which has already been introduced in England and for which there is plainly no demand in Scotland.

In addition to those legislative measures, the Home Secretary has announced that he intends to press ahead with proposals for England and Wales that will shift the burden of proof in criminal prosecutions from the prosecution to the accused. That will be done by allowing adverse comments on the exercise of the right to silence. That measure, coupled with the introduction of television censorship and a strategy of dismantling public service broadcasting, suggests that the Home Secretary is a willing accomplice in this erosion of democracy and is at heart a patrician autocrat.

As the Government proffer their explanations for these several measures, it becomes clear that in carrying out their utilitarian balancing act of arguments to justify them, Ministers have lost sight of the fragility of freedom. The jurist Ronald Dworkin well expressed what was happening in this country. In an article in *The Independent* on 8 September, he said:

"the value of liberty cannot be measured piece-meal in iotas of information sacrificed or imagination stifled or creativity impaired. When liberty is judged that way, measuring the costs of its compromise case-by-case against some gain in administrative or military or diplomatic efficiency or popular approval, it must always lose. For liberty, measured in that way against the immediate aims of ordinary politics, will always seem speculative and marginal; it will always seem academic, abstract and dispensable."

Not only the fractured parliamentary Opposition is concerned about the trend illustrated by this catalogue of Government legislation proposed in the Gracious Speech. *The Daily Telegraph*, normally a powerful supporter of the Government, said in a leader of 27 October that there was real concern about the ban on the broadcast of interviews with Sinn Fein. The same leader also criticised the Government's

"lack of respect for the very concept of local democracy".

It suggested that a Government entering their 10th year of power have a substantial duty to display a proper humility and to remember that the use and abuse to which future Governments might put these measures are not within the present Government's control.

The Home Office measures that have been the focus of the debate are the one that seeks to establish a statutory basis for the Security Service and that which provides for the long overdue removal of section 2 of the Official Secrets Act. They will require to be scrutinised in much more detail than is appropriate in the debate on the Loyal Address. I regret that the Home Secretary chose to treat the debate almost as though it were a Second Reading and devoted most of his speech to an exposition of the modest little measure on the Security Service. It is a modest measure and to make as much of it as he did was to illustrate the insensitivity to the issues of freedom that is all too characteristic of the Government.

The benefits that may be thought to flow from placing the Security Service after all these years on a statutory basis seem to be exiguous. The move may be welcome, but it does not seem likely to open security policy to scrutiny. That is because the proposed arrangements are for the establishment of a commissioner and a procedure for ministerial oversight. The commissioner will be answerable to the Home Secretary alone and, as far as one can make out from the Prime Minister's response to a question yesterday from the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) the intention is that accountability to Parliament will be exercised in future as it has been exercised in the past, without any disclosure of official Government thinking on security matters.

Of greater significance than that measure are the provisions proposed for the replacement of section 2 of the Official Secrets Act. Those provisions will certainly merit the most careful scrutiny, I hope on the Floor of the House. Clearly, the proposed legislation is a backward step for the security services and for the people who work or have worked in them. It is an extraordinary response to the "Spycatcher" episode that the Government have thought it right to introduce such a Bill. It is welcome in so far as it is designed to increase the flow of information or at least to remove the criminal penalty for revealing information. However, it is extraordinary that a measure that seeks to remove the traditional whistle-blowing right of the public fails to take into account the experience of other countries.

The provisions will not stop the Peter Wrights from publishing abroad. That can be achieved only by entering negotiations with other countries along the lines suggested by the House of Lords in the "Spycatcher" appeal. I hope that the Government can reassure us that such discussions are taking place, because, clearly, the publication of revelatory stories is very much against the national interest.

The Government and the Home Secretary would be more likely to achieve their purposes if they looked with favour on the United States example. In the United States, people in the security services are required to enter contractual arrangements with the Government. They are in a contractual relationship of trust that protects both the Government and the agents from unwarranted risks. How this works was demonstrated by the United States Supreme Court in 1980, in the case of Snepp *v.* United States. In seeking to return the profits of the publication of a book by a former CIA director to the nation, the Supreme Court held that a constructive trust would protect the Government and the agent. The Supreme Court said:

> "If the agent secures prepublication clearance, he can publish with no fear of liability. If the agent publishes unreviewed material in violation of his fiduciary and contractual obligation, the trust remedy simply requires him to disgorge the benefits of his faithlessness. Since the remedy is swift and sure, it is tailored to deter those who would place sensitive information at risk. And since the remedy reaches only funds attributable to the breach, it cannot saddle the former agent with exemplary damages out of all proportion to his gain."

The essence of that remedy is not just that there is a breach of trust and of contract but that there is a provision for Congressional supervision of the security services which is an integral part of the process of protecting the nation's secrets.

The Government's unwillingness to allow the establishment of a Select Committee, a committee of senior Privy Councillors or any form of parliamentary oversight of the security services is a mistake which will not assist the effective protection of the secrets that must be preserved. It flows from the Government's mistaken conception that their job is principally to protect information rather than to ensure that information is made freely available, save in closely defined circumstances. A democracy thrives on information being made available to enable the elected representatives to participate in debate in a truly informed way. It is regrettable that the Government are not promoting a freedom of information Act but seeking instead merely to do away with the plainly outdated section 2 of the Official Secrets Act.

I hope that during this Parliament the Government will be persuaded to review their attitude and will again consider the possibility of widening the right to information. There has been an erosion of freedoms in the Government's lifetime, and I have some sympathy with the Leader of the Opposition, who yesterday looked around the House at the conclusion of his speech and appealed to the good men and women who will resist this trend. He did not speak with any optimism about the prospects.

Our system of parliamentary democracy contributes to this erosion of freedoms. It is a system of Cabinet supremacy which does not work effectively when there is no sensitivity to the views of others, no protection for minority rights and no recognition that our constitution works not by its written provisions but by the conventions that one listens to the Opposition's point of view and concedes that one can get things wrong from time to time.

I do not believe that our constitution is working in a way that protects those essential freedoms. For that reason, I put it to the House, especially to the Leader of the Opposition who has addressed the issue but not come up with the answers, that there should be all-party support for the dispersal of constitutional power, particularly for the embodiment in our constitution of a Bill of Rights—a protection which virtually all other democratic and parliamentary Governments have enjoyed, including Canada, Australia, the United States and almost all the continental European countries to which we are gradually being drawn within the European Community.

The Labour Opposition missed a great opportunity to redress the imbalance in favour of Executive power when they stood apart from the attempt made by a Conservative Member of Parliament in 1987 to secure the incorporation of the European convention on human rights into our domestic law. It was a great pity that only a handful of Labour Members stayed behind on that Friday, thus denying the House the opportunity of expressing its view and taking that measure, which had all-party support, into Committee. The measure has twice been given backing by the House of Lords. It enjoys the support of many senior members of the judiciary. It would help to safeguard the constitution from the depredations of an overmighty Executive. I hope that Parliament will bring that measure forward again this Session.

6.56 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate on the Gracious Speech. I join in the congratulations extended by hon. Members on both sides of the House to the honourable and recently elected, and now vanished, Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars). I am sure that the energy that he put into his speech will be reflected in the energy that he puts into serving his constituents and that that task will be made somewhat easier because he represents a part of the United Kingdom that receives a large slice of the cake of public expenditure.

In turning to the Gracious Speech, I take my principal comfort from the penultimate paragraph:

> "Other measures will be laid before you."

There is one measure which is not included in the Gracious Speech but which many of us would have wished to see included and which has been promised to us for a considerable time. Before the last general election, the Government gave a clear undertaking that at an early opportunity they would introduce legislation to govern embryo research. That undertaking was honoured to the extent that we had a White Paper which we were able to discuss in January this year. Although the door is clearly ajar, it is not yet open. It is a great disappointment to me and to other hon. Members that, as yet, there is no firm proposal to give Parliament the opportunity to decide whether to legislate.

I do not speak to pre-empt any conclusion to which the House may come. The undertaking said that we would have an opportunity either to ban embryo research altogether, or to allow it with certain limitations and provisions, which would be enshrined in law. Presumably, if we decided to pursue the second course, it would be open to us also to amend those proposals that have been put forward and to introduce others that may seem fit. However, that opportunity does not appear to be available to us in the coming Session. If that opportunity is not provided, there is a grave risk that scientific enthusiasm —or, even worse, commercial exploitation—may run away with the situation and make it difficult for

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

Parliament to introduce the kind of controls which should be introduced at the beginning of a process and not halfway through.

I am sure that for many people—certainly for me—the early results of in vitro fertilisation and fertility research were greeted with enthusiasm and joy. I do not think that any of us could have objected to the birth of little Louise Brown or to the fact that her parents were able to have a child through the assistance of the medical profession rather than by an entirely natural process. But we then moved on and the process was no longer limited to the involvement of husband and wife. We moved on to surrogate motherhood and then to genetic research. Then, a few months ago, we were told that foetal hearts had been used in surgery.

Whether we approve of any or all those things, or whether we approve of them subject to limitations, it is clear that this is a major moral and political issue which should be brought before the House and on which the House should have the opportunity to pronounce.

When we discussed the White Paper in January, we discussed the situation which, in our innocence, we believed to prevail—that research was limited to embryos up to 14 days and, indeed, that that was well above what actually occurred in practice. Only half an hour later in the same debate, hon. Members were beginning to suggest that it would be reasonable for such research to take place on embryos up to 21 days. If we can do that here in a fairly detached way, removed from the medical realities and the enthusiasm of scientists who are rightly trying to push back the frontiers of knowledge, what of those actually engaged in the experiments and driven by the desire and enthusiasm for discovery?

The subject raises serious questions on which we should have the opportunity to express our views. It seemed rather feeble that we had been discussing research on embryos up to 14 days only to discover a few months later that parts of fairly advanced foetuses had been used in surgery. Leaving aside the aim of the surgery and the moral questions that must emanate from that discovery, it is clear that Parliament did not know what was going on. Professor Hitchcock did not simply get up one morning and decide to carry out the surgery. Assuredly, he had already researched it to some extent. Yet at the very time when he was researching it, we were discussing work on what were described as pre-embryos.

I believe that we need some kind of control. Certainly, we should be able to decide whether such control is needed. We are talking about beginning to create in a laboratory test tube rather than in a human body something which, in natural circumstances, would develop, as we have developed, into a full human being with emotions, intelligence, feelings, laughter and tears. We are talking about starting that process in a test tube and then deciding at some point to arrest the development of that human being and either to store it for future use or to destroy it as though it were just an ordinary piece of rubbish. That is an awesome thought. What worries me about the medical profession is not so much what it wishes to do—its thoroughly laudable attempts to prevent people being born with handicaps and to halt the erosion caused by disease—as the total absence of awe or humility in the statements made by those engaged in what must be the most important research of all time. I submit that if they cannot show awe and humility, perhaps it is for Parliament to instil it in them, at least in terms of legislation.

The developments that the White Paper suggests should be prevented make fairly horrifying reading. It suggests that we should prevent the creation of an entire human being in laboratory conditions outside the human body. We are told comfortingly that that is a long way off, and I am sure that it is. In vitro fertilisation was a long way off just a few years ago, but it came with awful suddenness. Do we not already have legislation to prevent such an enormity?

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): My hon. Friend says that in vitro fertilisation arrived with awful suddenness. Does she feel that it should not have arrived and therefore regret the research that made it possible?

Miss Widdecombe: If my hon. Friend had listened to the first part of my comments, he would have heard me say that whatever one's moral views—he and I may have different views—it is essential that Parliament should decide whether such research should take place and to what limitations, if any, it should be subject. My hon. Friend has misinterpreted what I said. When I said that in vitro fertilisation came suddenly, I said it in an attempt to suggest that other things, at which even my hon. Friend might wince, may come with equal suddenness. For instance, the White Paper suggests that the creation of hybrids should be forbidden. It seems to me an extremely serious matter that we should even consider such a thing, yet apparently it was thought necessary to suggest that we should legislate against such a development. We then fall back from the idea of legislation and leave it merely as a proposal.

Parliament should also have the opportunity to be informed about and to consider the alternatives to this kind of research. The alternatives were clearly set out by Professor Lejeune, Professor Chargatt and Dr. McLean. Parliament may eventually decide that those detailed alternatives are not all that they are said to be, but we should at least have the opportunity to examine them, and that opportunity must be within the framework of proposed legislation.

Why, despite the Government's clear undertaking and the White Paper, is there still no Bill? Is it because there is a hope that if we leave the matter long enough a consensus may develop to the effect that we cannot stop something that has already accelerated to a frightening extent so we had better take the coward's way out and say that as it already happens, and we see the benefits, we cannot now consider the fundamental moral issues that we ought to have considered at the very beginning?

Assuredly, there will be other legislation to occupy the Department of Health in the coming Session, but the legislation that will flow from the Butler-Sloss report will also heavily occupy the Department of Social Security. There is ample room in the programme for the Department of Health to take on a matter that has already been prepared in such detail. It could certainly take on this legislation as well.

Cynics may say that a society which apparently has no objection to dismembering a 22-week-old baby in the womb is unlikely to object to experiments being carried out on very early cells. The issue is deeper than that. Should we arrogate to ourselves the right to create human life? Should we arrogate to ourselves the right to destroy it? Should we really arrogate to ourselves the right to store it for future use? Those questions must be answered, and answered quickly.

As I said earlier, when we discussed embryos at 14 days, we did not know what professor Hitchcock was doing. This House sees what the medical profession is doing through a glass very darkly. If we saw it in its full light, even the most hardened cynic among us might well cry out for mercy at the way that we have arrogated powers to ourselves that could lead to the dehumanising of humanity and to humanity being something that is coldly created, dispatched, disposed of and undervalued. The final social implications of undervaluing human life, to the extent that we treat it in a test tube as we would treat any ordinary cookery recipe in a kitchen, are highly dangerous and something of which this House should be aware.

I welcome the Government's commitment to introduce legislation, but I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to hurry.

7.11 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): It has been some time since I and other hon. Members sought to catch Mr. Speaker's eye. I should not, perhaps suggest that it is invariably you, Madam Deputy Speaker, who gives me the opportunity——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Flattery will get the hon. Gentleman nowhere.

Mr. McCartney: With my kind of luck, you are absolutely right, Madam Deputy Speaker.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) attempted to widen the debate about freedom and opportunity. Much of what was said by the Home Secretary and those who spoke in support of him was an attempt to restrict the debate to a number of single issues. Important though they might be, that tended to detract from the debate about the effects of Government policy on fundamental freedoms and opportunities.

I speak from a base of constituency, local government and other interests, and I wish to illustrate why the Gracious Speech is as depressing as other Gracious Speeches during the past decade. It tries to drive a wedge between those with genuine freedoms and opportunities and those who form the mass of the working population, whose freedoms and opportunities have been reduced both directly and by the way in which local government and other agencies have been undermined.

Before I do that, it is only fair to comment on the exceptional speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars), who rewrote the last decade of political history. Like most nationalists, having reached the doors of the Englishman's castle, he beat a hasty retreat. He has returned to Govan rather than stay for the remainder of the debate.

Although I do not wish to make any personal comment about the hon. Gentleman, it is important that events are put into perspective. In the Govan by-election in 1973, I worked with the hon. Gentleman 24 hours a day for three weeks. I dragged around with him in his little Japanese-built caravanette. During that time, I learned a great deal about his philosophy and his political activities. Today, he has attempted to rewrite the reasons why Thatcherism has been visited upon not just the Scottish people but the working people of all regions, including the north-west.

The Scottish National party ratted on the Labour Government and went into the Lobbies with Thatcher and so introduced Thatcherism, in all its guises, to the Scottish people. We need no lessons from the hon. Gentleman on the defence of working people in Scotland or anywhere else. If he is looking for an alliance—a common front, a tartan front—with the 49 Scottish Labour members, I can only say that we have 180 Labour colleagues in England and Wales who consistently support our fight to beat back Thatcherism in Scotland.

Mr. Home Robertson: I shall remember that.

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend should remember that only three weeks ago I supported him when the House discussed Scottish legislation—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to make a case for my hon. Friend, so he should not upset the apple cart.

I wish to deal with the proposal to reform the law on local government capital housing finance and the conduct of local authority business. It is a Pandora's box of missed opportunities and enables further centralisation of Government control of local government democracy. Local government should be allowed to broaden opportunities both for citizens and for industry. Do the Government intend to make it more difficult for local authorities such as Wigan to promote activities such as derelict land programmes and the development of new industrial and tourist initiatives? Will the Government's proposals affect the activities of developing companies?

Before I became a Member of the House I was a director of Wigan Development Company, which was set up by the local authority using local authority assets. We consistently used ratepayers' resources to establish new businesses in the private sector, to promote training opportunities and to encourage the start of new businesses.

We also co-ordinated the introduction of new businesses into the community—for example, a new fibreglass company that created 1,000 skilled jobs. If such companies appreciate the worth of co-operating with an elected Labour local authority, why should the Government withdraw support and undermine the development of the local economy? As we approach 1992, with the need to develop a new, thrusting economy in the private sector, new jobs and new technology, it seems incredible that the Government, through capital activities and the withdrawal of grant, should seek to undermine Labour local authorities that are in the vanguard of new projects.

I represent a coal-mining community and am interested in the linking of the privatisation of the electricity supply industry with the environmental issue raised by the Gracious Speech. The Lancashire coalfields are in the throes of an asset-stripping operation. Last week, I and my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) met the Minister and asked him to visit the south Lancashire coalfield. He made the excuse that he had other engagements but said that he would consider our representations. Within hours Hobart house in London issued a statement to national newspapers saying that the Golborne colliery in my constituency would be closed,

[Mr. McCartney]

making more than 300 miners redundant. They had not been informed, and nor had the local authority or the area's Members of Parliament.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Has not that been the story throughout the Lancashire coalfield? For example, in or near my constituency there has been the closure of Bow, there is pressure on Parkside and so on. Is that not a disgrace?

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is correct; and it is part of an overall plan to soften up the industry, in the run-up to the privatisation of the electricity industry, to allow the importation of hundreds of thousands of tonnes of South African and American coal. To achieve that, they require in the first instance a rundown of the south Lancashire coalfield and the destruction of what it stands for.

As to the environment, the Government rub salt into the wounds of the rundown of the deep mining industry, which leaves large parts of my area derelict and without job opportunities, by their intention to introduce wholesale opencast mining of millions of tonnes of easily obtainable coal—another threat brought about by the proposed privatisation of electricity. Coalfield communities in south Lancashire are losing job opportunities, and another generation will face not one, two or three years of opencast mining, but five, 10 or 15 years. It will produce not 10,000, 20,000 or 30,000 tonnes but 1 million, 2 million or 3 million tonnes. Communities and villages will be surrounded and captured by the private enterprise philosophy of the Government, which will rape those communities in order to take from them as cheaply as possible the black gold of coal in a way that uses as little labour as possible, leaving local authorities and communities to clear up the remaining environmental dereliction.

Those of us who live and work in, and are committed to, the working communities in the coalfields of Britain are not prepared to see the next generation of young people, or our communities, destroyed by the naked opportunism of privatising the electricity industry. Coal miners will be the first victims of the importation of cheap coal.

We must also examine the Government's policy of asset stripping in relation to the privatisation of the water authorities. North-West Water has the largest holding of any water authority in Great Britain, with 150,000 acres of publicly owned land, much of it vested by the ratepayers and the local authorities in the north-west in the last reorganisation, without a penny of compensation. Now the Government intend not only to strip them of this public asset and sell it to the private sector, but once again to do so without compensation. What will the privatisation of water authorities do to sport and recreation and to the development of tourism in the north-west? It is clear from the leaks of the Government's intentions and from the off-the-record comments that this land is up for grabs to the highest bidder—whoever is prepared to pay the most to transfer it from the public to the private sector.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Is not one of the dangers, particularly in the north-west, where the water authorities own land of tremendous value that is part of our heritage, that if the land is disposed of, not only will they get the money for that, but our heritage will be destroyed in places like the Lake District and the Peak District? It is important that such areas should be preserved not only for us but for future generations.

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is right. All the signs will be changed. They will not say "The Peak District" or "The Lake District" but "Trusthouse Forte's National Park" and "Pay your £2 or £3 here". That is what awaits us as a result of water privatisation. The hon. Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown) giggles and laughs. He does it regularly. Indeed, it is the only contribution I have heard him making in the past 18 months. He never makes a positive contribution to the debates. If he has some other ideas, he should outline to us the Government's policies for the Lake District, the Peak District and the thousands of urban parklands controlled by the water authorities on which developers have their greedy little eyes.

If the Government were serious about the environment, why have they not introduced a Bill to deal with toxic waste? One would have thought it would be in their minds after the Karin B incident. Within 24 hours, the junior Minister had said that it could unload here and then, because of opposition from Conservative and Labour Members, changed her mind. The north-west has become the toxic waste bin of Europe. Daily, coming from Humberside and other ports, dangerous toxic waste substances are poured into in-fill sites in the north-west. Despite that, there is no legislation to be introduced in this Session by the Government that takes this seriously.

There should be a total ban on such imports, and toxic substances created here must not be placed in in-fill sites. The technology for the safe burning of dangerous materials is available. In my constituency and others in the north-west, we do not want in-fill sites to be utilised for burying the most dangerous of toxic substances, occasionally next to people's properties, with resulting dangers.

In my constituency there is a strike in a firm called Abram Alloys Ltd. The strike is not over wages and conditions but because 14 men have been sacked as they reported the company to the Health and Safety Executive because of the way it utilises lead, aluminium and zinc. Two men are currently off sick, one because he had a heart attack as a result of the zinc shakes, which are a common occurrence in places where the Health and Safety Executive's guidelines are not followed. Zinc in the blood is highly dangerous, and within 48 hours of the shakes this man had had a serious heart attack. Another has been seriously ill, again because of the damage caused by lead and aluminium poisoning in the plant.

What do the Government propose to do about the protection of workers? The measures in the Gracious Speech will undermine their ability to improve their working environment so as to protect themselves and take away from them basic opportunities to defend themselves against unscrupulous employers who are prepared to gamble with workers' lives. When workers complain, they are sacked—booted out of the factory—and are now standing on the picket line trying to draw public attention to what is going on. Again, in the Queen's Speech, the Government disregard any way to take action to protect workers and to defend of their health and safety at work.

The dangers are more widespread than the effects on the workers. People are living not 100 yards from the plant, and there are 300 or 400 houses in which live young women and young children. We know about the effect of lead poisoning on the brains and on the ability of young children. Despite that, there is no proposal from the Government to deal with the problem of toxic waste and its disposal.

What else have the Government failed to do to further freedom and opportunity and to prevent racism and sexism? There is an old saying that an Englishman's home is his castle—but not a bit of it when it comes to leasehold reform. In England and Wales hundreds and thousands of people who have purchased their houses from firms such as Barratt, Wimpey and McAlpine find that spending between £45,000 and £55,000 for a three bedroomed semi-detached property means only that they have bought the house and not the land underneath it and that the land is being sold on the property markets in London. Sometimes they are sold to companies that are owned outside the United Kingdom, and in one case in my constituency to a company whose chairman is wanted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for extortion.

Such companies are frightening the elderly by sending them letters and demand notices. For example, in an estate in my constituency, a survey was carried out to check how many garden sheds had been built, how many extensions to the property had been made and how many windows had been double glazed. Pensioners received letters saying that if they paid £400 in legal costs to the company, they would be given retrospective permission for such works. Another company wrote to some of my constituents and said that if they did not pay up within 28 days the leasehold would be sold. This happened when some of them were on holiday. The impression was given that selling the leasehold meant selling the property.

When it was introduced, the leasehold reform legislation of 1964 represented an improvement, but it is clear from the sale of leaseholds on the London stock exchange that the protections available are inadequate for working people who have to purchased their property. The Government should introduce legislation to ensure, for example, that every home built in 1989 has the freehold contained in the sale price, that people who have been leaseholders for five years should be allowed to transfer the leasehold without any further cost other than the charge for the land registry fee and that, for those people who have been leaseholders for more than 10 years, the transfer should be free.

There should be legal protection for people who do not wish to purchase the freehold or leasehold to prevent them from being harassed by, for example, insurance companies. Some large nationally owned insurance companies have linked up with sharks involved in this business. They write to my constituents saying, "We understand that you are insured with such-and-such a company. Unless you insure with Norwich Union"—a major and well respected insurance company—"within 28 days, we will take you to the county court because you are not insured according to the leasehold."

Unfortunately, some of my constituents believed those statements. They did not realise that, in going to the county court, the company would have to prove that they had damaged the property and had therefore undervalued and underinsured it. Some of my constituents have paid considerable sums of money. Insurance companies are paying the sharks a commission for harassing ordinary working people.

This is not 1888; it is 1988. The Government talk about freedom and opportunity, but there is not a word in the Gracious Speech about introducing legislation to protect leaseholders in England and Wales. It is not only highway robbery, but a sophisticated form of mugging carried out by men in pin-striped suits. We know all about that from Conservative Members.

In view of continuing unemployment, why have the Government not introduced a Bill proposing the right to work along the lines of that introduced by the Socialist Government in Sweden? The Minister often refers to the Labour Governments in New Zealand, Australia and Sweden, but, when it comes to social legislation, the Government simply turn a blind eye. As a result of the changes in employment training and the phasing out of the community programme, many middle-aged men and women are being locked out of the labour market. What about the 300 miners in my constituency made redundant last week? Most of them are over 50 years of age. They cannot be introduced to the employment training scheme. They are specifically excluded from it for two years and, even then, according to the guidance from the Training Agency, a person over 50 has a low priority for going on to such a scheme.

A large proportion of the long-term unemployed are therefore being forgotten by the Government. How can the Government be serious about bringing back into the labour market large numbers of the unemployed when they have not introduced a Bill giving them the right to work, developed a common programme of retraining or provided resources to enable the public and private sectors to develop a national training and a retraining programme? The Government are not interested in developing such a programme. They have been fiddling the unemployment figures and hoping that the rest of Britain in work will forget about the parts of Britain where people are out of work.

Opposition Members will not let the Government or the rest of Britain forget about the unemployed in our constituencies, including those in my region of the north-west. In the last decade, 38 per cent. of our manufacturing workers have lost their jobs and the opportunities and freedoms that are given through full-time employment in industry. The Government have not introduced a Bill to give them the right to work.

What about regional government? I am sorry that the hon. Member for Govan is no longer with us. Obviously, he has gone back to Govan.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): Scotland is not a region.

Mr. McCartney: I am not suggesting that Scotland is a region. The hon. Lady should recognise from my accent that I would never do so. I speak as someone who has had to leave Scotland to seek employment in an English-speaking area. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) laughs. As I transferred south, he transferred north. No amount of persuasion from me would make him transfer back again.

The growing divisions in society have singled out for special treatment by the Government not only Scotland and Wales but many regions in the north of England. Unemployment rates, lack of investment, the destruction of manufacturing industries, the lack of resources for our infrastructure, poverty and ill health in Merseyside and

[Mr. McCartney]

greater Manchester are as great, as, if not higher than, in Edinburgh, Glasgow or any other part of the United Kingdom. The crisis of capitalism introduced by the Government has reached all parts of the United Kingdom. That is why it is important to all of us, whatever our accent and wherever we live, that there should be a unified response. We cannot resolve the problems of Manchester without resolving those of Glasgow, Belfast, Edinburgh and inner-city London, where the problems and crises are very much the same.

The Government should have introduced legislation for the strategic planning and development of the infrastructure in the north-west. For example, what will they do about Manchester airport? It has clearly become the premier local airport in Europe, yet the Government are considering the introduction of a Bill to privatise it. Will that mean that American Airlines, Northwest Airlines or Transworld Airlines can purchase terminal 2 to control the airport and thus undermine the activities of British Airways and the 1,200 British Airways workers? The Government should explain their intentions.

The Government have introduced no legislation to deal with the inability of local authorities and regional and district health authorities to plan satisfactorily the return to the community of thousands of mentally handicapped and disabled people. The Government's care-in-the-community programme is in disarray and, as a result, tens of thousands of mentally disabled people who have been offered the opportunity to come back and live in the community as a family have had their hopes dashed by the Government. The Queen's Speech contained no proposals for the development of a national community care programme involving the mentally disabled and local authorities.

The Queen's Speech is a missed opportunity not only for the Government but, tragically, for millions of our fellow citizens who look to the Government at the eleventh hour for a change of heart to give them the opportunity that so many Conservative Members have and take for granted every day of their working lives.

7.40 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): I welcome the terms of the Gracious Speech. The Government appear to have solved the problems of how to keep ahead of public opinion, to deal successfully with economic difficulties, social discontent and civil disturbances, and to produce peace and relative prosperity. The Government's general approach is sound. That is to dismantle the apparatus of Socialism, to promote freedom in economic affairs, to move to remove the burden of oppressive taxation and to force more individuals to take responsibility for their own lives. All these things have been achieved, or are well on the way to being achieved. The result has been a transformation in the quality of economic and political life in Britain since the Government took power.

The very success of the Government's policies has revealed other problems, some of which are not so susceptible to Government action, especially those which are the consequences of a continual moral decline. These problems include crime, cruelty and indifference to the suffering of others.

I am glad that it is proposed to rationalise and modernise the Security Service and to give it at last a legal entity so that we know it exists and we have some comprehension of its form and organisation. We shall even have some power to ensure that it does not act irresponsibly in future. I welcome also the proposal to reform section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911.

There is one section of the Gracious Speech which falls behind the otherwise high standard of the others, and that is the one which sets out proposals for Northern Ireland. The measures that are announced in the Gracious Speech, which no doubt will be brought before us in the coming weeks, are pathetically weak to achieve their purpose. Whe terrorists are convicted of their crimes, they are imprisoned. They are released on to the streets when they have served only 50 per cent. of their sentences. The recidivist percentage is extremely high—I understand that it is about 20 per cent. In Northern Ireland there is no parole system. It is often said that there is 50 per cent. remission because of the absence of one. In the rest of the United Kingdom the parole system applies after one third of a prison sentence has been served. There is one third automatic remission for good behaviour.

It appears to be proposed that for terrorist offences in future there should be only one third automatic remission. That means nothing. It is a pathetic response to a murderous assault on the British people of Northern Ireland, which is being perpetrated by the IRA. The proper approach would be not to release terrorists on to the streets at all and instead to institute a sentence of imprisonment that will continue for as long as the emergency remains. That would mean that those convicted of such offences would be unable to return to a career of terrorism. The House will know that many of them have taken that course in the past.

We could institute a system of parole that would allow for individual cases of genuine remorse. That would provide an inducement for good behaviour. The effect of the proposal that is outlined in the Gracious Speech is to add one sixth of the sentence that is imposed on terrorists who have received fixed terms of imprisonment. It is insulting and stupid.

It is proposed also to introduce a requirement for an oath against violence to be taken as a condition of candidancy in local elections. This is a serious mistake. We should not qualify the franchise by a test of political opinion. If Sinn Fein candidates—people who we know support the violence of the IRA—are not welcomed in our democratic elections, we should be honest about it. We should ban their organisation as we have banned the IRA. It is silly, prissy and unconstitutional to impose a test of political opinion on candidates, whether in Northern Ireland or anywhere else in the United Kingdom. It would be proper that an oath of allegiance be administered if there is to be a political qualification, but that requirement was abandoned years ago by the then Government in a mistaken effort to come to terms with terrorism.

The Government are strangely lacking courage in their current proposals for Northern Ireland and their approach to its problems. The proposed new measures are timid and are likely to be ineffective. They give offence without harming the enemy. They are willing to wound yet afraid to strike.

The only policy that we have never tried in Northern Ireland is the one that stares us in the face. We have tried every other policy, including devolution, direct rule and even government by consultation with the Irish Republic. All these policies have been unsuccessful because they fail to take into account the unyielding determination of most Ulstermen to remain British. The remaining option is to grant them complete integration with the United Kingdom. The greatest mistake that we have made in Ireland in recent times is to include within the borders of Northern Ireland a large population which gives its allegiance to the Irish Republic. Those who are members of that population will never be reconciled to being within the United Kingdom. They produce support for the IRA and are its mainstay, yet they are a small minority of the whole.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stanbrook: No, I shall not give way. I shall soon be finished.

Those who give allegiance to the Irish Republic should be given the chance to leave the United Kingdom. Let Ulstermen choose whether to remain in the United Kingdom or transfer to the Irish Republic. Let us transfer the opting-out border areas to the Republic. Give those who find themselves on what they regard as the wrong side of the new border generous resettlement grants to enable them to move to the country of their choice, in one direction or the other. The Queen has no need of unwilling subjects. Let those who wish to leave the United Kingdom do so. We can then let the courageous British people of Northern Ireland live in the peace and security which they deserve while fully integrated with the United Kingdom. They will then be represented in British Governments by British political parties.

7.48 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) has gone down the road that has brought bloodshed and death to the island of Ireland for the past 600 years. I should say that I rarely speak on Irish matters because I was born and bred in Ireland. I come from a family with long roots in Ireland that suffered at the hands of the stupidity, on occasions, of this place over history. I hope and pray that those responsible in the current Government take not one jot of notice of the insanity that we have heard expressed over the past few minutes. How do we redraw the borders of 1922? How do we overcome matters that cost the deaths in the civil war that followed? How and where do we draw the line? Are we to tear human beings from their roots, their homes and their land? Are we to treat human beings in that disgusting way?

Mr. Home Robertson: The final solution.

Mr. Bermingham: It has all the smell of the final solution and it is horrendous. It is ugly and it falls ill from the lips of anyone in this place.

As I said, I did not intend to speak about Ireland, but one could not let what we have just heard go unanswered. When I looked at the Gracious Speech, I possibly looked at it in my own naive way and thought that I would find something in it that I could, perhaps, try to support. The policy of the last eight or nine years has been slowly to negate the freedoms of the people of this island, and to remove from us much that has been cherished over the years. The Government did not like local government, so they started to take away housing, started to impose their will on education, started to change the rules on social services, cut the resources, and gradually strangled it. Why should not people who live in a particular area decide how they should spend their resources? However, if it did not fit the Government's policy, they took that power away.

I notice that in the Gracious Speech the Government said that they will do all that they can to raise the standards of education. How about giving the children some books as starters, because there are still schools up and down this land which do not have enough books? We have heard the nonsense about student loans. My eldest son is shortly to go to university. What is this stupid and cross-eyed idea that they have about student loans? There was a time when we actually encouraged children to go to university. We believed that it was in the interests of the nation.

I still believe that, and so do the Opposition. The Government, however, who want to raise the standard of education, do not supply the tools that are needed—the buildings, the infrastructure, the books, the teachers and the opportunities. Why on this island do we have such a low rate of persons continuing education post-16? In Scotland or Ireland—we come back to that island again—the percentage is in the upper twenties. I am pleased that in my constituency in St. Helens—it may have something to do with its historic Irish connections—26 per cent. of children over the age of 16 stay in further education, and that is something of which we are proud. The local authority has had to make great sacrifices to maintain education standards as it has been slowly throttled out of existence by the policy of the Government.

I then looked on in the Gracious Speech in the hope of finding a nugget of gold. It is a pity that the Home Secretary is not here, because I had almost a cri de coeur for him. I had hoped that the legislation for the protection of children would lie with his Department and not with the Department of Health. I have good reason for saying that. I declare an interest as a lawyer, and I want family courts. Many of us have hoped and prayed for family courts ever since the Finer report—and there I thought was the nugget of gold. However, I see the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment smiling, and I fear that I have not found my nugget of gold. That legislation will once more lie at the door of the Department of Health, so I fear for the future of our children.

If ever there was an opportunity of reviewing the law after the Butler-Sloss report on the Cleveland affair, taking the adversarial system out of the care order cases, and bringing back what many of us believe should be the primary concern in those cases—being able to act speedily, quickly and efficiently in the interest of the child—it is now. But I suspect that this nugget of gold is not to be found.

I searched on in the Gracious Speech in the fruitless hunt for this nugget of gold. I looked at the proposals for the security services. I even read the Bill published today on the new security system. It is really a load of garbage from top to bottom. It says and does nothing. It is a sop thrown because there has been so much complaint, quite rightly, about such matters. It says that the Home Secretary must sign every warrant for illegal entrance and phone tappers. The poor old Home Secretary will never stop signing warrants, there will be so many of them. I do not know where he will find time to come to the House to explain his actions.

[Mr. Bermingham]

It then says that the commission will make an annual report, which will be reported to the Prime Minister. That is interesting, but unfortunately most of us do not have access to the Prime Minister's Office. It says that the report will be published. However, although it will be published, the commission can leave bits out, if it feels that it is not in the interests of the state. I have the awful feeling that the first time we see one of those reports it will be the size of a postcard and written on one side only. It is nothing more than a sop.

I notice that at long last section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 is sought to be reformed. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) proposed a sensible measure last year, but the Government voted it down. I dread what we shall have in its place, because the Government are obsessed with secrecy, with power and getting at anything that opposes them—be it a trade union or anybody else. Their obsession is a disease that comes with the arrogance of power. They have had nearly 10 years of always wanting their own way. If anyone gets in their way, they have a go.

The Gracious Speech was delivered by a gracious person, but unfortunately the writers of the speech left the likes of me no nuggests of gold, and for the people of St. Helens not much hope for the future, either.

7.56 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I had not planned on speaking in the debate, but when I listened to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), I was surprised and staggered by some of the points that he made about freedom and fairness. I felt that those points completely ignored the reality of the tremendous opportunities that have been opened up by the Government.

Certainly we should not listen to any fairness lecture from the Opposition. One has only to look at yesterday's *Official Report* to see the appalling attempts at unfairness when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was interrupted no less than eight times in her speech on the Gracious Speech, as well as receiving seven interventions by Opposition Members. It used to be the hen-pecked husband who claimed that his wife always interrupted him. In this House it seems that the mother hen is interrupted constantly by the Opposition's chickens, who are afraid to debate but prefer to shout and try to shout down our Prime Minister, who is one of the most respected anywhere in the world.

Mr. Home Robertson: Not in Scotland.

Mr. Shaw: Yes, even in Scotland, if one talks to the people who are interested in the future of the nation and those who actually want some of the opportunities offered by the Government developed further.

By comparison, however, *Hansard* shows that the speech of the Leader of the Opposition was not interrupted. Indeed, it was heard in stony silence. Of course, little interest was shown by any hon. Members in the speech of the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, I counted less than half the Labour Members as present. Clearly, many of the right hon. Gentleman's own Members had not even turned up to listen to his speech. That is because the case against this Government is a weak one.

The nation is more free, more fair and has more opportunity that it ever would have had under a Labour Government. The Opposition have failed to explain whether the last Labour Government were more fair when they refused to pay the pensioners' Christmas bonuses in 1975 and 1976. Were the last Labour Government more fair when they changed the calculation basis for the old-age pension in 1976, thereby removing eight months inflation from the calculation? Of course, many people wonder whether there was more freedom under the Labour Government when they supported the closed shop that forced so many people out of work and onto the dole queues.

I congratulate the Government on the Queen's Speech, on their home affairs policy, and particularly on the broadcasting White Paper, which has been mentioned many times. I am only disappointed that we may have to wait an extra year before the Government's proposals are implemented. The broadcasting White Paper is excellent, and I speak as the director of a radio station and as one experienced in commercial radio, which offers more choice than ever before. It was introduced by a Conservative Government—Labour did not like it. Today, 40 per cent. of the population listens to something that Labour did not like and did not want. Forty per cent. of the population enjoy commercial radio; only Labour do not enjoy it, because commercial radio offers greater choice, freedom and opportunity to ordinary people.

I am pleased by what the White Paper says about television. The public want satellite and cable television, and when watching it they will remember that the Labour party did not want them to have the freedom to view it.

As to official secrets, I and my constituents are not in the front line of those demanding reform. Dover has been at the centre of the nation's defences and has successfully defended the nation for more than 1,000 years because those who sought to invade were denied the secrets of our nation's defences. However, the Government have listened to those who believe that there should be greater openness of a kind that no previous Government felt able to permit. I welcome the proposed Bill concerning official secrets.

I welcome also the proposed Security Service Bill. The Government have tackled a difficult area head on and in a way that no previous Government dared. They will bring out into the open the way that MI5 operates, so that many will feel more confident, knowing that out security services have a formal basis of operation and may not really have under surveillance their front or back doors or be bugging their telephones.

For years, the Opposition have claimed that the security services looked into the lives of ordinary people. That is far from true, and I welcome the opportunity the Bill provides for the security services' basis of operations to be formally laid down for the first time. The security services are necessary for the nation's defence and for the defence of the realm. It is important that their work should be unhindered, but on a basis that has been approved by Parliament, with the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary having the freedom to control and manage their operations.

The improved opportunities identified in the Gracious Speech represent some of the Government's greatest achievements so far, and more will be achieved in the future. Today, people have more opportunity than ever before. There are now 2·5 million more home owners than there were in 1979, when Labour left office. The Conservative Government have provided the opportunity to own the home in which one lives. Today there are 9 million more direct shareholders, but there are also 16·5 million indirect shareholders through pension funds and life assurance. The coal miners often worry about whether their industry should be in the private sector, little realising that they have, through their own pension fund, investments in the private sector of the order of £10 billion, and that their future is greatly dependent on it.

A week before the last general election, I found myself in a coal mining community pointing out that, fearing a Labour victory, the stock market had fallen by the equivalent of half a billion pounds of the coal miners' pension fund. So even the coal miners have an interest in ensuring that a Conservative Government remain in office and that there are more opportunities for share ownership, more shareholders, and more economic success.

There are more people in jobs or in training than ever before. The Government have created a phenomenal number of new jobs. Everyone recognises that that has been achieved at the cost of others, but they were subsidised jobs which had no future and were not helping the nation's productivity. Manufacturing industry is producing more from a smaller labour force than ever before. That is real success and I hope we shall see many more years of it.

The opportunity for people to enjoy a better education has also been expanded by the present Government. That has been achieved not just by the Education Reform Act 1988 but by the opportunities provided by student loans. It is noticeable that people do not have enough opportunities to enjoy further education. I do not mean education of a theoretical nature but business education. We do not have sufficient business graduates. We need more successful business managers who can create jobs and develop our economy towards the year 2000. Student loans and other forms of assistance give people an opportunity to enjoy further business education of a practical nature.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House how?

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) asks me how. Once student loans have been established and people have grown used to repaying them, they will then take them up to develop their education later in life. We shall see education continuing after university, at business graduate level. More and more people, some of whom already take out loans for business degrees, will have greater opportunities. I want to see that practice developed, which will be good for the nation and for the people.

The opportunity to develop one's own economic future is also greater than ever before. The development of small businesses and of self-employment has continued. There are 3 million self-employed people, which is nearly 1 million more than when Labour was in office. I confess to being disappointed that the Gracious Speech made no mention of further measures to help small businesses. Needless to say, the Opposition have not raised that point; the Opposition Front Bench never mention further measures to help small businesses. The Government's small business policy has been a success, but that does not mean that enough is being done and that more cannot be done. I hope that it will be done. The fact that the Prime Minister was able to state that more than 1,000 new businesses are being created every week is good news, but it is not necessarily good enough. Why should not 2,000 or 3,000 new small businesses be created every week? More individuals should be encouraged to set up on their own, perhaps by the offer of fiscal incentives.

I recommend that consideration be given to the entrepreneurs scheme, whereby entrepreneurs may enjoy the same tax relief as those who invest in small businesses under the business expansion scheme. It will also be helpful if small companies are given corporation tax relief so that their small profits can be used to build up their reserves and that they may develop more easily than they can at present. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will look into those matters before the next Budget. The fact that the Gracious Speech made no mention of small businesses does not necessarily mean that there will be no legislation or other action during the Session.

I welcome the Gracious Speech. There is much in it for my constituents and for the nation. As a result of the measures it announces, there will be more freedom and fairness, and undoubtedly there will be more opportunity for all.

8.9 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I find people like the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) wholly incomprehensible. The sort of speech he has just made and the values that he tried to express in it demonstrate the gigantic chasm between the two ends of the United Kingdom. At one point he had the effrontery to say that the Prime Minister was one of the most respected leaders in the world. He should try coming to my country. He would find that she is about the most hated person in Scotland——

Mr. David Shaw: I visited the hon. Gentleman's country recently, as my wife is a Scot with a large family in Scotland, and I can assure him that many people in Scotland respect the Prime Minister immensely.

Mr. Home Robertson: There may be many such people, but the hon. Gentleman would struggle to find them in heavy concentrations anywhere in Scotland. The Prime Minister is one of the most universally loathed people there.

This brings me to the points made by the now absent hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars). I cannot help recalling that, 10 years ago to the month, he and I were on the Government Back Benches and he was kind enough to congratulate me on my maiden speech. Shortly after that, his new friends joined the then Conservative Opposition and voted down the Labour Government, ushering in 10 years of grim Government for the people of Scotland, about whom he claims to care.

I have been watching the hon. Gentleman's perambulations in and out of various parties and constituencies since then, and without wanting to be churlish to him in his absence, I must say that I do not welcome his election to the House. The loss of a Labour seat can only bring comfort to the Prime Minister and Cabinet whom he and most Scottish people so earnestly loathe.

[Mr. Home Robertson]

However, I welcome the debate that has been initiated by the Govan by-election result. This is my first opportunity for five years to speak with the freedom of a Back Bencher. I must express serious fears about the prospects for the unity of the United Kingdom that I care about and support. The hon. Member for Govan is a comparatively trivial manifestation of the danger posed to the unity of the United Kingdom. The real source of the problem is the right hon. and learned Member for Edinbugh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), the Secretary of State for Scotland. The general election of 1987 should, on any analysis, have been a constitutional turning point in Scotland. The result had been widely predicted as the Doomsday scenario and the Secretary of State now imposes alien rule on a nation which has returned only 10 Tory Members of Parliament and in which support for the governing party has slumped to below 20 per cent. in the polls.

The Conservative party professes to be baffled by the ingratitude of the Scots who refuse to embrace the message of the hard Right. That was the message conveyed by the hon. Member for Dover. We have heard various responses to that idea. the Prime Minister came to Edinburgh last year and addressed an astonished General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in her rather bizarre "Sermon on the Mound", and we are now being subjected to even heavier doses of hard-line Thatcherism.

It was the Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. and learned Member for Pentlands, who told the House in 1976:

> "Scotland is the only territory on the face of the earth which has a legal system without a legislature to improve, modernise and amend it. This is a crazy anomaly".—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1976; Vol. 922, c. 1832.]

It may have been a crazy anomaly they: it is downright intolerable today after almost 10 years of Conservative rule.

There are ways and ways of approaching the problems of government by minority. The wise approach should be through conciliation and, when possible, partnership with the people being governed. At the other extreme there is what I choose to describe as the Jaruzelski option.

It is interesting to contrast the styles of the former Secretary of State for Scotland, the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), and the present Secretary of State for Wales, with the Rifkind regime in Scotland today. The substance may not be so very different, but the style has been calculated to embitter and alienate the subjected people of Scotland. It is abundantly clear that the Secretary of State cares far more about his standing in Downing street than about his reputation in Scotland, the nation he is supposed to be serving. He seems positively to relish opportunities to humiliate and provoke the people whom he is supposed to serve.

Let us go through some examples. The poll tax is to be inflicted on the people of Scotland. The paperwork is already coming through our letter boxes and the tax will be levied in four months' time. The disruption of Scotland's excellent education system is to be taken one stage further as a result of the Queen's Speech. The Housing (Scotland) Act 1988 is designed to exploit the homeless for the benefit of private landlords. The Secretary of State is ruthlessly exploiting his power of patronage in Scotland. Examples of that include Sir Alex Fletcher, who was rejected by the people of Edinburgh, Central at the general election, turning up as a paid member of the Scottish Development Agency. There is also the bizarre phenomenon of the Greater Glasgow health board being nominated by the Secretary of State but not representing anyone in Glasgow. It is apparently exclusively composed of clones of the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), and it is now confronting the nurses of Glasgow head on.

The Secretary of State for Scotland has enthusiastically embraced the Jarulzelski option. We in Scotland find it puzzling to hear the Prime Minister calling for freedoms in Poland which she is denying to the subject nations of the United Kingdom. The scenario of Government from the bunker at St. Andrew's house, supported by English Tory Members who seem to find the situation enormously amusing, must raise questions about how the Scottish majority should repond. Obviously, the conventional process of debates, questions and Committees must continue in the House, but the cynical manipulation of the composition of Scottish Committees and the shameless refusal even to set up a Scottish Select Committee have inevitably tarnished the image of Parliament in Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and our hon. Friends on the Front Bench, past and present, have approached this task conscientiously and constructively, and sometimes, when we have been lucky, that fact has been reflected in Scottish press reports. But when the Government administer the devolved power of a nation such as Scotland with flagrant disregard for the wishes of its people and go out of their way to humilate the elected representatives of the majority at national and local level, other considerations must be raised. The situation calls for a little more than ritual debates that end at 10 pm and occasional prayers against statutory instruments which extend the process to 11.30 pm.

Many people in Scotland would have liked the Opposition to make a major stand in the House to highlight the obscenity of the Housing (Scotland) Bill in the last Session of Parliament. I, too, should have liked the opposition to that Bill to be taken a little further and to have made a stand to block progress on that oppressive legislation—but that could not be done: we were overruled. I am not advocating a course of general disruption in the House—I have been here long enough to know the Standing Orders and to know that such disruption would not be practical—but properly targeted issues should be exploited to highlight the extreme examples of repression in Scotland. Under these extreme circumstances there is ample justification for the initiatives outside Parliament, as well as those in the House.

This potential for constitutional crisis has been on the Scottish scene for a long time. I think in particular of one of my favourite predecessors in the East Lothian seat in the Scottish Parliament—Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, who wrote in a pamphlet in 1706:

> "It is certainly the Interest of all Good Men to promote a nearer Union with our Neighbours in England . . . in the most Absolute and Incorporate Union that can be made betwixt these two Nations, there are several Interests (and of the greatest Consequence to which are and must be reserved separate to each Nation . . . It seems beyond human comprehension, how these separate distinct Interests, and Establishments, can be regulated and supported by one Parliament".

He went on:

> "and the Scots deserve no pity, if they voluntarily surrender their united and separate Interests to the Mercy of a united Parliament, where the English shall have so vast a majority".

He was a man with foresight, but I doubt that he realised that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) would one day become Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and spring that trap on the people of Scotland. As we know, the Scottish Members surrendered Scotland's Parliament and it is only in comparatively recent years that a consensus has grown up in Scotland about the case for our own Parliament and for home rule within the United Kingdom.

Nevertheless, our two nations have lived with that inherent contradiction of one Parliament and two legislative areas for 281 years. We have two distinct nations with separate legal systems, separate administrations, different Churches and separate financial centres, which still share one Parliament, in which one nation's representatives must be massively outnumbered by those of the other nation. It is to the great credit of a long succession of Governments that such an inherently flawed system has survived for so long. It is a great pity that the matter was not resolved by mutual consent in 1979, following debates in the House on the Scotland Act 1978 and the referendum, when the people of Scotland voted by a majority of 77,437 to set up their own assembly within the United Kingdom.

As we know, this Government unceremoniously repealed that Act and they have gone out of their way to confront Scottish public opinion ever since. We need initiatives outside Parliament too, and I suggest that the proposed establishment of the Scottish constitutional convention, following the extremely important and closely argued report of the Grieve committee entitled "A Claim of Right for Scotland", is a matter of profound importance and significance. The Secretary of State for Scotland has rejected an invitation to take part in such a constitutional convention in Scotland on the grounds that the Government

> "do not believe that Scotland would benefit from an additional layer of Government".

That conveniently overlooks the fact that the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Scottish Office are already a layer of government that is unaccountable in Scotland. That is what people in Scotland find so intolerable.

We are rightly and properly concerned about the rights of other small nations around the world—perhaps Estonia is a relevant and topical example. It is time to recognise the rights of the nations of the United Kingdom too. Conservative Members would do well to remember that Britain is not a nation—it is a union of nations and there should be respect between the nations in the union if the union is to survive and prosper.

The Secretary of State is provoking a potentially dangerous and destructive situation and he is opening the door for destructive forces, such as those represented by the crude nationalism of the Scottish National party. There is great irony in the fact that the Labour party should be made to suffer for the actions of a Tory Administration, but that is what happened at Govan two weeks ago. Nothing will be achieved by whingeing about that state of affairs. We must take the initiative on the Scottish political scene. That can be done by sharpening up our style of opposition in the House and instead of responding to pressure, we should be seen to be taking a lead in expressing the mandate that we have been given by the people of Scotland. If that means that the focus of Scottish politics has to shift temporarily from the House to the Scottish constitutional convention, so be it.

My immediate predecessor as Member for East Lothian, John Mackintosh, had a clear vision of dual nationality—Scottish nationality and British nationality. The overwhelming majority of Scots share that desire for a continuing close partnership with our neighbours south of the border. That is a union that is not incompatible with the election of an assembly in Scotland to control the legislation, the power and the budget—which has already been devolved to the Scottish Office. Scotland wants home rule within the United Kingdom and that is a legitimate demand which must be accommodated by the House and by any responsible Government. If the Government are not prepared to acknowledge that need they will be putting the unity of the United Kingdom in jeopardy. One must remember that they are the party that professes to be the Unionist party, yet the actions of Ministers are putting the union of the United Kingdom in jeopardy.

The Scottish majority—the Labour party and the Social and Liberal Democrats—will, I hope, approach the constitutional convention within the spirit of a union that we want to preserve. It would be a spectacular irony if, by its actions and omissions and by provoking the people of Scotland over the past nine years, the Conservative party was to open the door to the nationalism expressed by the hon. Member for Govan today.

8.35 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): It has been interesting to listen to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson). It is not clear which part of the Scottish Labour party he representas or exactly what initiatives members of the Scottish Labour party will adopt. Perhaps they should choose to stand on a turntable rather than a platform, so that they can face in all directions at once and members can change direction at any moment. The Labour party is shell-shocked by its total defeat at Govan and it will take a long time to decide in which direction to face. No doubt we shall hear more speeches like the hon. Gentleman's

I praise the Government for the measures that they have introduced in the Gracious Speech. It is excellent to see a 10th year of radical measures being brought forward, which will continue to restore the country's fortunes and which will improve the quality of life in every possible way.

I regret that I did not hear all the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), but I was sorry to hear her criticise the Government for not having chosen to bring forward a Bill on the Warnock committee's proposals. The Government have committed themselves to bringing forward legislation when the time is right and I congratulate them on the way in which they have handled the issue. It is an area in which there have been rapid developments and the Government are aware—even if some hon. Members are not—that this country leads the world in medical biology. It is impossible for one country to lead the world in all aspects of scientific research, but it is accepted by all the people who have studied the matter that this country has a worldwide lead in medical biology. I call on hon. Members not to be frightened by finding this country in the lead, but to call on the great resources of British common sense so that we can build on that lead—not just technically and scientifically, but in the way in which we cope with the moral and ethical dilemmas involved.

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

The Church of England Synod has come out in support of research into in vitro fertilisation. I am sorry that some of the other Churches have been unable to follow that lead. I praise the work done by the Voluntary Licensing Authority, which was set up in 1985. After its first year's work, it was praised by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister who said that she hoped that its first year's report would be

"widely studied, because the organisation's work is excellent."—[*Official Report*, 24 April 1986; Vol. 96, c. 421.]

I recommend hon. Members to read not only the first report but the report on the second and third years, which show the continuing work of the Voluntary Licensing Authority.

The World Health Organisation has recently held an international conference on in vitro fertilisation at which speaker after speaker stood up to praise the work done by the Voluntary Licensing Authority. It is the envy of the world—a peculiarly British establishment and solution to the problems and opportunities that have arisen. We have given a lead to other countries on how to manage research in that subject so that the public can have confidence that there are sufficient controls.

Some countries have rushed into early legislation, which they will probably regret. The state of Victoria in Australia has enacted legislation that is restrictive and Germany is in the throes of introducing restrictive legislation. In this country, we can be satisfied that we need not take lessons in human ethics from a country with a record such as Germany's. No doubt Germany's restrictive legislation has been a reaction to the ghastly excesses suffered in the past.

There is no doubt that more research is needed. The latest report from the Voluntary Licensing Authority showed that 4,687 patients were treated in 1986 but that only 605 live births resulted. That is a success rate of less than 13 per cent. and clearly shows the great need for improvement. The 4,000 patients whose treatment was unsuccessful must have suffered great unhappiness.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone talked about the awful suddenness of in vitro fertilisation. I do not think that it is at all awful for those who have benefited. Many thousands of children have been born in this country as a result of IVF, and I understand that in France last year 3,000 such babies were born. I am sure that parents and their children will not consider that awful at all. Some parents pray to be able to choose not to pass on to their children inheritable disorders that may result in early death or serious handicap. Those disorders could be avoided if research allowed us to choose which embryos should be implanted and which should be discarded.

In congratulating the Government on not bringing forward knee-jerk legislation, it may help if I retrace the history and development of IVF research. The first IVF baby in the world was born in this country in July 1978. That was possible only because 10 years of research had already been undertaken by the late Patrick Steptoe and Professor Robert Edwards. It was a source of great satisfaction that Patrick Steptoe was honoured in the New Year honours list and fortunately he was able to receive that honour before his death. It is surprising that world leaders should take so long to achieve recognition just because their activities are controversial.

In July 1982 the Government set up the committee of inquiry into human fertilisation and embryology chaired by Dame Mary Warnock, and that committee reported two years later, in July 1984. It recommended that a statutory licensing authority should be established to regulate research and IVF infertility services. A small minority of those serving on the committee opposed research in different forms and shortly after the report was published a great campaign was organised. Hon. Members were subjected to a barrage of mail and petitions calling on them to demand a ban on all research. The former right hon. Member for South Down, Mr. Enoch Powell, tabled a Private Member's Bill—the Unborn Children (Protection) Bill in November 1984. It was debated in the House but it did not get further than Report. Although that Bill initially achieved a majority, its majority declined as it went through its various stages. I am pleased that at each stage at which we have considered such legislation the number of those who have supported the view of Mr. Enoch Powell has declined.

The opinion polls that have been published show that a majority of the public support research when it is designed to prevent congenital handicap or bring other such benefits. Marplan and NOP polls were conducted in 1985, and I feel sure that if an opinion poll were carried out today, a greater number of the public would support research, given that so many more children have now been born as a result of IVF.

In its latest report, the Voluntary Licensing Authority shows that 44 centres have been approved. I challenge those who oppose research to say exactly what harm it has done. A great deal of benefit has come from it. It is only because those who oppose research are unable to reconcile conflicting principles in their own minds that they have been unable to accept the benefits that have accrued from research that has been satisfactorily controlled by the Voluntary Licensing Authority.

Many organisations have come out in support of research. Progress—the campaign for research into reproduction—has been supported by 50 different organisations. I shall cite a few to show the wide support that exists. Organisations that are members of Progress include the Association to Combat Huntington's Chorea—a particularly vicious inheritable disorder whose elimination would bring great benefit—as well as the Association of Community Health Councils of England and Wales, the Birmingham Stillbirth and Neo Natal Death Society and the British Humanist Association. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone talked about humanity, but I ask her where is the humanity in forbidding the research.

Member organisations also include the British Medical Association, the Chelsea hospital for women fertility unit, the CHILD organisation, the Family Planning Association, the International Cerebral Palsy Society, the Lichfield and District Mental Welfare Association, the Maternity Alliance, the Medical Women's Federation and MENCAP—the Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults. I was particularly disappointed that the Roman Catholic archbishop chose to resign from MENCAP when it came out in support of research. How on earth can his resignation have helped the interests of hundreds of thousands of sufferers from mental handicap? I call upon the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church to review their position.

Progress is also supported by MIND—the National Association for Mental Health—the National Association for the Childless, which covers afflictions from which about one in 10 of the population suffer. Progress is supported by SENSE—the National Deaf Blind and Rubella Association—the Spastics Society, the Tay Sachs and Allied Diseases Association and the Tuberous Sclerosis Association of Great Britain, and many hospitals have also chosen to support the work being done as part of the Progress campaign. I have shown the broad measure of support that exists not only among the public but among the associations that represent people with special interests, and I hope that the minority of people who oppose research and try to pretend that they are more than a minority will recognise the force of that support.

I do not know whether a private Member's Bill on this subject will be tabled this Session. None of those tabled so far has got anywhere and I hope that hon. Members will now wait until the Government feel that the time is right to introduce legislation.

The Voluntary Licensing Authority was set up as a temporary arrangement. When the authority came into being three years ago it was as

> "a temporary measure pending Government legislation."

There is a saying that nothing is so permanent as a temporary arrangement. As the temporary arrangement has worked so well and is the envy of so many other countries throughout the world, I ask the Government to continue to examine the work of the organisation and to remember that it has done well and achieved the results that we wished it to achieve. The Government should not rush into legislation on the basis of a knee-jerk reaction to unfounded fears expressed by the opponents of research.

8.39 pm

Mr. Jim Callaghan (Heywood and Middleton): The Gracious Speech says:

> "My Government will vigorously pursue their policies for reducing crime."

That is a decision that all sensible and law-abiding people will applaud and support. I was glad to hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) give the Labour party's approval to such a policy.

However, in recent months hon. Members representing constituencies in the north-west, including my hon. Friends the Members for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) and for Burnley (Mr. Pike), have been lobbied by the Greater Manchester police authority about rising crime in the area and fears that manpower resources are inadequate to counter that trend. The result of that lobby was that the north-west group of Labour Members asked for two meetings with Lord Ferrers—one before Prorogation and the other a few days ago. As Lord Ferrers is the Home Office Minister responsible for police affairs, the north-west group of Labour Members pressed on him the claims of the Greater Manchester police authority. However, despite the fact that two weeks ago Lord Ferrers accepted an invitation from the Greater Manchester police authority to visit the Manchester force, and despite our lobbying on behalf of the GMPA and the fact that Lord Ferrers appeared to be sympathetic to the case, we fear that our pleas will go unanswered.

Accordingly, I make a further plea on the Floor of the House to the Home Secretary to listen to the Greater Manchester police authority's request for policies to reduce crime in the GMPA area, a request which I believe is covered by the statement in the Gracious Speech.

The Greater Manchester police authority and every sensible person want more bobbies on the beat to act as deterrents, particularly to those aged between 15 and 25 who commit more or less on-the-spot crimes, and to deter young criminals. The details of the cases speak for themselves. The Greater Manchester police authority was created under section 24 of the Local Government Act 1985. Its functions are laid down in section 4 of the Police Act 1964. Its overall duty is to maintain an adequate and efficient police force for the county. The 1964 Act makes the authority responsible for deciding the force's budget and for providing the chief constable with sufficient resources of manpower and other facilities.

It has become obvious, from the information that I have received, that the resources that are now available to the authority are inadequate, which can affect the efficiency of the police in tackling the rising crime rate in the area. The implications of the GMPA's revenue budget for 1988-89 prove my point. In his original submission to the GMPA, the chief constable had proposed a budget of about £201 million before the Home Office grant—£24 million more than the budget for 1987-88. Of that £24 million, a total of £19 million related to spending to which the authority was committed. The remaining £5·7 million represented the cost of a number of growth items that were calculated to release additional officers for operational duties on the beat. These proposals included the civilianisation of a further 80 posts, a point which we raised with Lord Ferrers—a vehicle replacement programme and a £1 million contingency fund to cover unforeseen eventualities.

It is clear, however, that the available resources are insufficient to allow such developments, no matter how desirable they may be. The continuation of a policy of civilianisation is important, particularly in the light of the GMPA's request for an additional 700 officers over five years. The Home Office has said that no such increase can be expected unless further inroads into civilianisation take place.

When the GMPA was formed in 1974, the establishment was 6,600, against the then chief constable designate's view that it should be 7,685. In response, the Home Secretary said in a letter dated 7 February 1974 that he had noted that an eventual establishment of 7,685 was considered desirable and he assumed that the authority would prepare a phased plan for the expansion of the force towards that figure.

Establishment reviews in 1978 and 1980 recommended realistic establishments of 8,792 and 9,161 respectively. Since the formation of the GMPA, however, a series of small increases has taken the establishment to its current level of 6,943. Leaving aside the 135 posts added in 1976 when the force took over the responsibility for policing Manchester airport, there has been a real increase of only 208 officers in 14 years. That is a 3 per cent. increment, as compared with 10 per cent. in establishments nationally. Meanwhile, there has been a 100 per cent. increase in crime in the Greater Manchester area.

In 1975, the number of rapes was 60. In 1987, that figure had risen to 110, an increase of 83 per cent. In 1975, cases of woundings and assaults totalled 3,692. In 1987, that figure had risen to 7,361, an increase of 99 per cent. In 1975, burglaries in dwellings amounted to 18,208. In 1987,

[Mr. Jim Callaghan]

that figure had risen to 54,253, an increase of 198 per cent. In 1975, cases of robberies and assaults with intent to rob totalled 547. In 1987, that figure had risen to 2,132, an increase of 289 per cent. In 1975, thefts from vehicles numbered 13,250. In 1987, that figure had risen to 57,321, an increase of 332 per cent. In 1975, cases of criminal damage amounted to 4,889. In 1987, that figure had risen to 30,525, an increase of 524 per cent. The figures, showing the rising level of crime in the Greater Manchester area, speak for themselves.

A recent analysis of the number of crimes per head of population in English and Welsh forces suggests that the Greater Manchester area suffers more crime per person than all but one other force in the country. In 1987, a total of 9·3 per cent. of all recorded crimes in England, excluding London, were committed in the Greater Manchester area. It is not only that demands on the police, imposed by crime, have increased. Increases in other areas can be compared with the 3 per cent. growth in establishment between 1974 and 1987. There has been an increase in emergency calls to the police of 30 per cent., a 12 per cent. increase in road accidents and a 10 per cent. increase in the number of persons dealt with for crime.

To combat this massive increase in crime, the Greater Manchester police authority sought in May 1987 the approval of the Home Office to increase its establishment by 700 officers over five years, commencing with an increase of 140 constable posts in the financial year 1988-89. The Home Secretary decided, in his wisdom, not to grant the authority's application. The GMPA decided that further representations should be made to all Members of Parliament in the Greater Manchester area, and it sought a meeting with senior Ministers in the Home Office to discuss the authority's request.

The north-west group of Labour Members responded to the GMPA's case by requesting two meetings with Lord Ferrers—the first before he visited the Greater Manchester police force two weeks ago and the second after he had visited the force. We tried to press on him the urgency of the Manchester case and reaffirmed the request for 700 extra policemen on the beat within five years. The authority reminded him of the Home Secretary's statement at the recent Conservative party conference that, in view of the undeniable case in many police forces for more officers on the beat, there would be a further increase in police manpower of 1,000 officers next year.

It was our impression, following our discussion with Lord Ferrers, that a large proportion of the extra officers would be allocated to the Metropolitan police force and that the rest would be thinly spread among forces throughout England and Wales. I therefore urgently request—I am sure that my plea is backed by all Members from the north-west region—that in view of the soaring crime rate in the north-west, the Home Secretary should reconsider the case that has been made by the Greater Manchester police authority for more bobbies on the beat to ensure that all sections of the community are safe on the street and at home, and free from the fear that crime generates. More bobbies on the beat would help to dispel that fear.

I urge the Home Secretary to reconsider his verdict on the Greater Manchester police authority's request.

8.51 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): I hope that the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Callaghan) will forgive me if I do not follow him too far down the track that he has laid out, but I agree with him about the seriousness of crime and the importance of having an increasing number of policemen on the beat to deal with it. I pay tribute to a great deal of what the Government have done in my part of Hampshire, and no doubt in the hon. Gentleman's area, to beat crime. We must do more, and the importance of doing more is a cross-party issue which must be pressed on the Home Office at all times. I am sure that Ministers recognise that.

Of all the statements of intention in the Queen's Speech, the one that I welcome with special warmth and the one which underpins the success of much else that the Government have been able to do is the pledge to

> "continue to pursue firm financial policies designed to bear down on inflation."

I believe that zero must be the target. To continue to tolerate anything more is to tolerate the continuing theft of people's savings and earnings equivalent to what happened in those supposedly darker days some centuries ago when the coinage was quite simply clipped rather than the more subtle devaluation which we have had over many decades of inflation.

As memories of the dizzy heights of inflation of the past have receded, there is a danger that its evils will be forgotten or ignored and people say that we can put up with a little—what is 2, 3, 4 or 5 per cent.? We cannot put up with it. We must not flinch from the consequences of a policy designed to reduce inflation. We must reduce it with great determination.

We did not flinch in 1981. I remember thinking then, when the Chancellor presented his Budget, that he was rather like the boy who stood on the burning deck whence all but he had fled. He faced the necessary measures then with the greatest courage, and the Government must summon the same courage to face the challenges that still remain.

The Government understand the importance of sound money. That fact has underpinned much of the confidence that they have enjoyed at home through three successful general elections, and it buttresses our standing in the world. The relationship between a sound economy and influence in foreign affairs is unquestionable. Without the one, the other will drain away, and with it will go the hegemony, unrivalled by any British leader in modern times, which the Prime Minister enjoys in Europe and the rest of the world.

It is a relief to see in the Queen's Speech that the Government have no intention of relaxing the determination of a reforming Administration to tackle some difficult and controversial issues. It is also a relief not to see proposals for some legislation. Along the lines of the prayer, the Government ought to leave undone those things which they ought not to do. We have had a great deal of the things which past Governments ought not to have done, but I see no more in the Queen's Speech, and I welcome that.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary spoke about issues which involve crime and punishment. I am pleased that a Bill for the care and protection of children is to be introduced. It will cover a great deal of ground and implement sensible recommendations arising from the

Cleveland inquiry to reform the law on child care and the family. We must protect innocent families from state-led officiousness—we saw much of that during the Cleveland inquiry—but we must not relax in the face of horrifying cruelty to children which sickens and disgusts any sane person.

In the criminal justice reforms, the Government have already amended the Children and Young Persons Act 1933. Since 1 October this year, the maximum sentence for child cruelty has increased from two to 10 years. It was too late to prevent a woefully inadequate maximum sentence of two years being passed this week at Winchester following the conviction for battering to death the three-year-old Sarah Worthington. The law has now changed, and none too soon. It empowers judges to pass sentences which suit the gravity of harrowing cases of violence, irrespective of whether it results in death.

I hope that, when framing child care legislation, and during its passage through Parliament, close attention will be paid to the advice of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. I have recently been made a vice-president of the Portsmouth branch of the NSPCC. Its members, and others throughout the country, work ceaselessly on behalf of children and families and will no doubt have much advice to offer. I hope that it will be listened to by the Government—I am sure that it will.

At the end of the Gracious Speech are the hopeful or ominous words—it depends on one's point of view—

> "Other measures will be laid before you."

I do not know what they might refer to, but I wish that they would refer to an amendment to the law in accordance with early-day motion 1237 of the previous Session concerning the treatment of widows of service men, an issue which has exercised the minds of hon. Members on both sides of the House for many years. It has been signed by many Members, and what I might call the ginger group has suggested that the word "immediately" should be inserted. I should like to remind the House of the motion.

> "That this House recognised the unfair treatment of the war widows and widows of Servicemen who retired before 31st March 1973, and those widows who married their husbands after their retirement from the Armed Forces both prior and subsequent to 6th April 1978; and urges Her Majesty's Government to remove these artificial time bars in order that all war widows and widows of Servicemen may receive the current rate for those pensions irrespective of the date of their husband's retirement or the date of their marriage."

"Other measures" in this Session or the next could easily put right something which really rankles with many people in my constituency and throughout the country in the constituencies of hon. Members on both sides of the House. The implementation of legislation along those lines is overdue and would be widely welcomed. I hope that it will receive serious consideration.

I understand from today's press that we are promised 16 Bills rather than the 44 that we had in the previous Parliament. However, I suspect that we Back Benchers will not notice very much difference, that the 10 o'clock rule will be suspended with depressing regularity, and that we shall be working as hard as ever. I have moved nearer the House, and while I shall support the Government with no less loyalty, at least I shall be able to support them in greater comfort.

8.59 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate. The proposed legislation outlined in the Queen's Speech was received with mixed feelings in the communities which I represent. Perhaps it is significant that in 1988, which is the 20th anniversary of the commencement of the civil rights campaign in Northern Ireland, two of the issues addressed by that campaign are finally addressed by the proposals for legislation in the forthcoming Session.

What might be called the three great demands of the civil rights movement were a house on need and not creed, a job on endeavour and not favour, and universal adult suffrage. There is still an anachronism in terms of voting in Northern Ireland. Those who previously resided in the Republic of Ireland, but who may now have resided in Northern Ireland for 32 years, can vote to elect a Member to this House or to Europe, but cannot vote on how their rates may be spent by local government or who should represent them in a local devolved assembly. I welcome the Government's intention to remove that anomaly.

The second great demand was that a job should be gained on merit and not on whom one knows or who supports a particular application. I hope that the proposed legislation on fair employment will take on board the criticisms that were offered when the White Paper was introduced and debated in the House. After 20 years, 10 of which were under the existing fair employment legislation, the 1985 report revealed that very little had changed in terms of discrimination on religious grounds in employment practice.

I hope that at last the Government will get to grips with that issue and lay it to rest once and for all. I hope that they will shape a future of fair employment and redress and eradicate the injustices of the past. We have waited for a long time and I hope that the proposals will come to fruition in the next Session, although we shall have to wait for the terms of the proposed Bill before passing comment and judgment on it.

My party does not welcome the proposed legislation on the declaration of non-violence. That may sound strange from a member of a party which at all times has rejected violence as a means of achieving a political objective. It may seem strange coming from a party which at all times has avoided the use of verbal violence to incite inter-community strife. We oppose the proposed legislation because of the practical consequences that it will have in the council chambers and the communities in Northern Ireland. Perhaps, having discussed the matter with the Ministers concerned, having made detailed submissions to the Ministers and knowing that the argument for non-implementation was won in the summer of 1988, we would have seen the end of this piece of legislation, which can be only detrimental to the democratic process in Northern Ireland.

The proposed legislation is a gross interference with the normal democratic process. If proof were needed, it is the fact that the Government are not extending it to elections to this House or to the European Parliament, but are confining the declaration of non-violence to elections held within Northern Ireland.

I and my party, coming from a political position at the coalface of opposition to violence, oppose the measure for very solid reasons. We do not want any opinion in Northern Ireland to be disenfranchised. We want to see

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

the spotlight of publicity on all aspects and attitudes within our community. We want to expose those vile and reprehensible attitudes and we want to have the opportunity to highlight and spotlight those within our council chambers—and, if there is a devolved institution, within our assembly—who support violence, actually or verbally. The irony is that the legislation, as I understand it, will require a declaration of non-support for violence. The definition of violence has to be determined, and I do not think that it will ever be satisfactorily determined by legislation. Who will define support for violence? Are we talking about participation in physical violence or participation through membership of an organisation? Are we talking about verbal violence? The House should remember that the verbal violence that we hear in our council chambers is every bit as destructive and divisive as violence on the streets because that division of opinion in local government is translated into the community.

People who speak about the need for a declaration of non-violence always and only speak about the violence of Sinn Fein and the IRA. It is correct that those organisations should be mentioned, but we should remember that there is an equally big problem in the Loyalist community, and that 200 members of the Ulster Defence Association are presently serving life sentences for acts of violence.

I notice that no members of the Democratic Unionist party are present. That party subscribed to the Ulster Resistance Organisation which has been found guilty of storing huge caches of arms. The DUP has distanced itself only in a half-hearted manner, by saying that its intention was to have a well-disciplined army of men. Are we to decide whether that is incitement or support for a violent objective? This is a grey area and will bring the whole democratic process in Northern Ireland into disrepute. That is a great tragedy because, Lord knows, the recent history of local government, especially in Northern Ireland, is scattered with division, acts of verbal intimidation and verbal violence and the Government's proposals will add to that.

The Government have introduced the legislation, but are preparing to run away from its implementation because the offence will be not a criminal but a civil offence. Who will have to take action? Presumably it will be the local councillor, although I have heard a rumour that an amendment has been made to the original proposition that councils as a body may be able to take action. There is nothing more depressing or more likely to create antagonisms than the process of law in which we are about to engage the people of Northern Ireland.

In the years since 1985, ratepayers' money has been spent week after week and month after month in the pursuit of blatant party political objectives. I am speaking about the "No" campaign against the Anglo-Irish Agreement. This legislation gives carte blanche to people to spend more and more ratepayers' money in the pursuit of a party political viewpoint. I am convinced that the Government will regret the day that this piece of legislation is introduced.

The Government are not prepared to take up the cause of the law that they are about to introduce but are leaving it to the individual to incur expense and risk—and there will be risk. The Government have abolished juries in Northern Ireland because of the risk to jurors, yet they are preparing to ask people to risk taking civil action against the person who is purported to have supported the men of violence. It is a very bad law and, like all bad laws, it is worse than no law at all. At this very late stage I ask the Government to reconsider their intentions and to prevent us from creating more and deeper divisions in the communities that we represent.

I ask the Government to take note of the debate on the White Paper on fair employment. Will they ensure that meaningful targets are achieved and given statutory backing? That is the only way in which the imbalance can be redressed.

I have confined my remarks to those aspects of the Gracious Speech dealing with Northern Ireland, but there are two other important subjects. Communities are undergoing a traumatic experience with the regrading of nurses. Irrespective of who is to blame for the mess and irrespective of the rights and wrongs, it is imperative that the Government take firm and positive action to restore harmony in the nursing communities and ancillary nursing communities and to restore confidence in the service to the people who ultimately must suffer—the patients. I ask the Government from the bottom of my heart to intervene, even if there is some loss of face. My constituency includes a high proportion of the nursing fraternity. The Government's actions are creating a division that will do untold damage to the nursing fraternity, to nursing care and eventually to patients.

I draw the attention of the House to a paragraph in the Gracious Speech:

> "My Government will continue to attach very great importance to protecting our environment, both nationally and internationaly."

If ever there were a weak statement of intent, that is it. There is no intention to comply with or to support the basic parameters laid down by the European Community on safety controls or to subscribe to minimum dosages, whether of toxic or of nuclear waste. There is no intention to introduce legislation to eradicate acts of grave neglect or to impose limits on the pollution-causing industries. My constituency is opposite Sellafield and I may bore the House by continuing to speak on this subject, but it constantly raises its head in my community.

The Gracious Speech does not refer to any intent by the Government to play a meaningful role in protecting the environment. The last time I heard a comment from a Minister on this subject, I could not believe my ears. He said that, to eradicate acid rain and the greenhouse effect, we should start expanding the nuclear industry. There is nothing more ludicrous or more contradictory than that statement.

It is late at night and, although I should love to develop that subject, I want your eye to look kindly on me in future, Mr. Speaker. I ask the Government not to utter platitudes but to give us positive action in coping with the greenhouse effect, transportation of toxic wastes and treatment of nuclear wastes. The Government should be honest and say whether they have already decided to dump nuclear waste at Sellafield. Everyone considers that that decision has been made already.

9.13 pm

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): There have been a large number of contributions on a variety of subjects. I am sorry that it has not been possible for every hon. Member who wished to speak to do so and I hope that they will have an opportunity during the rest of the week.

We have heard contributions on the security services, freedom of information, the DSS, family courts, the disasters of privatisation, Northern Ireland and Scotland. I listened with great care to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars), who made, I suppose, his maiden speech. He has made a maiden speech before in this place, and I do not know whether one can make two such speeches. He certainly made a vigorous contribution and I am sure that we shall hear a great deal from him between now and the end of the Parliament, when he will depart.

As shadow Minister for women, I looked forward with curiosity to the Gracious Speech, because last month the Government made the amazing discovery that more than half the population were women. According to the *Daily Express*, "Crusading Maggie" had

> "ordered a new Government drive to end discrimination against women."

To achieve this,

> "the Ministerial Group on Women's Issues has been secretly working on the strategy".

I do not know why it needs to be so secretive. The group is composed of eight men and two women—that comes as no surprise—and will apparently root out discrimination against women by "scrutinising" future Government legislation.

The sheer power of the proposals, not to mention the composition of the group, left me breathless with anticipation of the Government's programme for the coming Session and the new era of equal opportunities that it would bring. Sadly, as I heard the reality, as opposed to the rhetoric of the Government, I was forced to recall that the two are usually very different. The Minister of State had told the press that the aim of his group was

> "to clear the way for career women to achieve their goals and to protect the vulnerable."

I see no sign of either of those aims in the Government's programme, nor any sign that the Government have begun to understand that women, men and all disadvantaged groups want rights not patronising Tory protection. We know from bitter experience of the past nine years that we can expect neither rights nor protection from a Government who have done more than any other post-war Government to foster inequality, vulnerability and insecurity.

The Government are led by a woman Prime Minister who rightly took up all the opportunities for women for which Socialist women had fought—the right to enter university with a grant and not a loan, the right to enter the professions and to earn equal pay, the ability to get child care, and the right to enter Parliament. Finally she walked through the door of No. 10 and closed it in the faces of millions of other women.

The principles that guide Labour Members are in stark contrast to those of the Tories. We understand that the commitment to achieve genuine equal opportunities must be central to Government measures—a commitment to dismantle discrimination and break down the barriers of prejudice and bigotry which limit the opportunities of so many women and of black and ethnic minorities, which divide classes and place people with disabilities and those who care for them outside the economic and social community, which deny gay men and lesbians free choice and respect, and which render children and young people powerless.

We shall therefore scrutinise with great care the children's Bill proposed by the Government to ensure that children's rights to protection from abuse and to the highest quality of care both from the community and from those who look after them at home are paramount and that the necessary resources to provide care and support services for all children and parents are made available. We shall also continue to press for Government action to raise standards through education, which must give emphasis to ensuring that boys and young men acquire the skills of caring for themselves and others rather than just making science and technology compulsory for girls and young women.

Indeed, a Minister from the Department of Education and Science—the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher)—has been sent out to tell young women, "Get ready for divorce, girls," a somewhat stunning and surprising rallying call for the supposed party of the family. The Minister was, in effect, saying that girls had to be educated because one day they might be divorced and would have to go out to work. I must tell him that most of them would like to go out to work at some stage in their lives anyway, so he should not lay emphasis on their being divorced first. He no doubt told them about the brave new opportunities that the Government intend to open up for young people and women at work.

During the past few weeks a series of written answers have trailed the contents of the next employment Bill. It will be very much like the 1986 Act. Then, as now, the Government were forced by Europe to act to remove discrimination against women. They delayed and prevaricated but, eventually, we were forced to take a sugar-coated pill. The sweeteners were European requirements such as equal retirement ages in some areas, but inside the pill was a severe dismantling of health and safety regulations for women, which also played a role in diminishing the standards for men.

Once again the Government are being forced by Europe to introduce a Bill. I welcome any legislation that provides genuine equality of opportunity, especially the repeal of section 51 of the Sex Discrimination Act. However, I shall not stand idly by if attempts are made to weaken the health and safety protection for workers by using the mask of inequality. Where protection is out of date and unnecessary, we shall welcome its repeal, but there are instances when protection should be levelled upwards to include men—for example, working with lead. The Government must act appropriately in such cases. Unfortunately, the wording in the Gracious Speech gave the game away. We are not dealing with "unnecessary obstacles", although the Government persist in considering health and safety as such. Lumped into the Bill will be further attacks on trade union representation and employees' rights. The Bill will be about that, and not about greater equality of opportunity.

Further proof of that fact was contained in this year's Local Government Act which, disgracefully, dispensed with contract compliance. Yet the Gracious Speech contains provisions for equality in Northern Ireland. If we can make provision for religions—and I am not against

[Ms. Jo Richardson]

that—why cannot we do so for women and those with disabilities? The Government have dispensed with their legislative protection.

No measures are outlined in the Gracious Speech to facilitate the 900,000-strong increase in the numbers of women with young children who will be seeking to return to work in the coming years. The Government's response has been to announce further tigntening of the availability-for-work test, which they have already applied ruthlessly, to remove thousands of women from the unemployment register by rigidly refusing to recognise child care responsibilities and the care of elderly, sick or disabled relatives.

Britain and Northern Ireland are at the bottom or near bottom on virtually every policy indicator for child care facilities. Successive Ministers have been directly responsible for blocking and wrecking the European directive on parental and carers' leave. They have savaged employment rights for pregnant women in paid employment, especially for part-time workers. They have eroded the right to claim unfair dismissal, the right to return to work and the right to statutory maternity pay and the universal maternity grant.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Richardson: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I have little time left and cannot give way.

The Government have introduced, through yet another of the Chancellor's so-called brilliant economic ideas, a tax on workplace nurseries as a perk. They have slashed local authority funding, so that we now have fewer publicly funded day nursery places than in 1945, and out of school care is virtually non-existent in most areas. The Government's response to this exercise in child care and parental provision is to announce an advertising campaign to encourage employers—not themselves—to provide child care. They should remove that tax on workplace nurseries before they go any further down that road. The Government should be advocating an integrated programme of child care giving choice to parents.

The needs of carers, who are now greater in number than the women at home caring for children, are similarly ignored in the Gracious Speech. There is not one proposal in it addressed to the recommendations of the Griffiths report on care in the community. The Government's proposal to bring forward, at last, the European directive for equal treatment in occupational pension schemes will not be much use to women who cannot seek employment because care in the community is not provided for their dependants, or who are forced to retire early to care for their dependants. That is now the second most common reason for women's early retirement.

We recognise that economic and social policies cannot be artificially divided, and that we have to tackle the root causes of both economic and social inequality if we are to eliminate the economic and social impoverishment that they generate. We also understand, as my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) said yesterday, that positive legislation and action by central Government to empower women and to improve their economic and social status is crucial and enriches society as a whole.

All the reliable evidence available to us shows that continuing unemployment, low pay and inadequate benefits and pensions will leave some 18 million children and adults existing on or below the poverty line by 1991. That is one in three of the population. The Government's dogmatic pursuit of deregulation, privatisation and cuts in public expenditure will do nothing to halt or reverse this trend. Our pensioners, the majority of whom are women, are the coldest in Europe in spite of what the Under-Secretary of State for Health says. Our children and their parents will continue to be deprived of their rightful education and caring needs. Homelessness and mortgage foreclosures, rent arrears and fuel poverty will continue to grow.

Hospital waiting lists and the increased burden on home nursing for women will increase further. Our discriminatory immigration laws will continue to deprive black people of a united family life and exacerbate the racism that pervades our society and underpins the discrimination that black people face at all levels of society. Local government will go on being deprived of the resources to make our streets and estates lighter and safer. The hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) made a most interesting speech about lighting on the streets, and I agree with him. He said that it was easy for local authorities to help.

We need not simply lighter and more welcoming streets where women and old people would not feel frightened, but estates with proper locks on doors. That would improve the situation. However, these things cost money and when local authorities are forced to make choices between one proposal and another, such measures often suffer. Many women and black and elderly people will remain trapped in their homes after dark and cut off from social contact and employment day and night because of the lack of safe, affordable transport, which is particularly important to women who live in rural areas.

Yet again, despite the Government's new window dressing, we find over half the population deprived of rightful opportunities to build their own pathways out of poverty and denied real freedom to contribute their talents, wisdom and expertise. Acknowledging those talents and that wisdom and experience would make a better life, not only for women, but for their children and for men, too. I wonder that the Prime Minister can sleep at night with all that she has on her conscience——

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): She does not have a conscience.

Ms. Richardson: I have come to the conclusion that, as my hon. Friend says, she does not have a conscience. The sooner that she and her Government go, the sooner that better life for all people, to which women could make a contribution, will come, and it will come soon.

9.30 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I thought that the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) rather spoilt her otherwise enjoyable, balanced and moderate speech with that unnecessary personal attack on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. She is also, alas, rather ill informed about the important Government committee, the ministerial group on women's issues, which was set up by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in 1986. To show how important it is, I should point out that the first ever chairman was my right hon. and learned Friend, the then Minister of State at the Home Office, now the Chief Whip. It is well known and is attended by the chairman of the Women's National Commission and her co-chairman. In the 18 to 20 months that I have been in the Home Office, many women's groups in this country have been well aware of it. I have letters on my desk from national and local women's groups all over the country asking that issues concerning women should be put before that ministerial group. Before the Labour party goes to Rottingdean and decides to cook up women's issues as something to sell to the electorate, it should find out the facts about the matter.

This has been a good and wide debate and there have been some notable contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House. Some particularly important questions have been asked by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and I must devote part of my speech to replying to his questions, although I shall not be able to keep my remarks entirely to the issues that he raised. I should be wrong if I did not begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) on his pseudo-maiden speech, as someone who has previously been a Member of the House.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: It is a retread.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend says it is a retread. Consistent with his new status as a retreaded Member of the House, he was heard in semi-silence with semi-respect and gave way from time to time, which is unusual in a maiden speech. He then left the Chamber, but I am not sure whether he was wise or sensible to do so because he missed hearing a great deal of vitriol poured on his head from all around him on the Labour Benches. I do not know if his ears were burning, but tomorrow's *Hansard* will certainly show that there are a number of politically motivated men and women on those Benches who wish to verbally sandbag and mug him.

The hon. Gentleman's appearance in the House may well mark an interesting stage in British political history because, after all, the Labour party was born largely in Scotland. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's victory in Govan will mark the beginning of the long decline of the Labour party in this country.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook, my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) and others raised important matters on official secrets and the Security Service Bill, which was introduced this afternoon. The White Paper that sets forth the view of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on the reform of the Official Secrets Act 1911 is a liberalising document. It will lead to the removal from the criminal law of a great weight of material that is currently subject to the criminal law under section 2 of the Act. The House will have to make its own judgments when the Bill is published, which will be in the not-too-distant future.

Following the excellent debate which took place in July, I think that the House would expect the Government to have listened. It might also expect some of the views which were then expressed to have been reflected upon by the Government during the summer. At the same time, I do not think that the House would expect us to encompass in the Bill, when it is published, everything which was advocated during the July debate.

In a lucid speech, my hon Friend the Member for Thanet, South said—I think that I am representing him more or less exactly—that he thought that the official secrets legislation that is in prospect would be a step in the right direction.

Mr. Aitken *indicated assent.*

Mr. Patten: When the Bill is published, I hope that my hon. Friend will feel that the step forward is one of decent size, even though he may not be able to agree with everything that it contains. I hope that there will be much within it with which he will agree. It would not be fruitful for me to continue to comment on what the Bill might or might not contain. I merely say that it is important that those who are extremely interested in these issues, if not passionate about them, in this place and in the media scrutinise the facts contained within the Bill, rather than any fiction that they might pretend the Bill contains, when it is published. It is important that debate on a reforming measure, when it comes, is based on fact, not on fiction or on fantasies which have been dreamt up by those who have certain views on the issue.

I shall try to answer one question directly before moving on to the Security Service Bill, which was referred to by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. I can find nothing in the Acts mentioned by the right hon. Gentleman that negates what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said in his simple statement that the disclosure of Budget secrets will no longer have the protection of the criminal law as set out in section 2 of the 1911 Act. The Acts introduce obligations of non-disclosure, but those are placed on the commissioners and tax inspectors. The Acts do not create any criminal offences for such disclosures. It is right that they create penalties, but they rely on such conduct as fraudulent evasion and incorrect tax forms, which I think we all would judge should be punished by the criminal law.

During the speech of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) I read the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1970, which contains 540 sections and 16 schedules. I could find nothing within it on which the hon. Gentleman relies for his information. If he will identify the relevant sections and send that information to us, we shall consider them.

I applaud the qualified welcome which the Opposition have given to the Security Service Bill. I think that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook said that he hoped that the Opposition would be able to support it, subject to close parliamentary scrutiny. I was pleased with that response. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends welcome the trend towards openness on security matters that has been marked during the period in which the Government have been in office. I shall give some major examples and some minor ones to demonstrate what I mean.

First of all, the Prime Minister has come to the Dispatch Box on nine occasions since 1979 and made statements to Parliament. Secondly, it is this reforming Government who introduced the Interception of Communications Act 1985, which has been widely welcomed, and has not been criticised by the Opposition. Thirdly, it is this reforming Government who in 1987 appointed a staff counsellor for the security services. Fourthly, we are about to publish an Official Secrets Bill. Fifthly, we have this afternoon published the Security

[Mr. Patten]

Service Bill. Those are substantial changes, which somehow the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979 simply avoided.

Mr. David Shaw: They forgot.

Mr. Patten: As my hon. Friend says, they forgot.

There are also some minor examples which, all in all, add up to examples of the great importance of the continuing trend to openness in local government. For example, it was this Government—not an earlier one—who allowed visits to Ministry of Defence establishments, such as Aldermaston, Portland Down and Greenham Common. It is this Government who have published the Department of Social Security manuals on the social fund. Secrecy was the motif of the Labour Government on those issues. It is this Government who, in the teeth of strong opposition from the Labour party, have published the reports of Her Majesty's inspectors of schools. It was not something that was wanted by the Labour party, but was something that was wanted by parents. When all those continuing developments are added up, it will be shown that there has been a slow, certain and measured width of information made available.

Secondly, the right hon. Members for Sparkbrook and for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) stressed the need for greater parliamentary oversight. Of course I respect their views, and the right hon. Member for Devonport, especially, has been an extremely lucid exponent of this argument. I do not agree with him any more than I agree with the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. We shall have the opportunity to debate this Second Reading of the Security Service Bill, and doubtless we shall have the opportunity to debate it long and hard in Committee. However, I say at this stage that I believe that the case for parliamentary oversight, as made by the right hon. Members for Sparkbrook and Devonport, stems from some unclear thinking about the role of Parliament. It either demolishes the barrier of secrecy or it attempts to straddle it, which is the logical fault in the argument. We get predictably painful results either way.

If there was a new body charged with parliamentary oversight that knew it all, it could say nothing without damaging results. It would be within the ring of secrecy, and it could not say anything. However, if instead of speaking it was given powers to act, it would simply usurp the responsibilities of Ministers for the national security. The gap in our system was not parliamentary oversight, but redress for the citizen who felt that his or her freedom had been in some way attacked by the activities of the security services. It is this reforming Government who will, for the first time, give the aggrieved citizen the opportunity to seek redress in the Bill. That is a major step forward.

Mr. Bermingham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Patten: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but like his hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson), I have so much to reply to in a short period that it is difficult for me to give way. I shall certainly try to do so before the end.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook asked an important question about warrants, and I hope that my explanation will encourage him to think that we have it right. It is all there in clause 3 of the Bill. He mentioned the specific case of the search made of premises in Scotland. The search was not made by members of the Security Service, but was made by members of the police force with a properly drawn-up warrant from a magistrates court under existing law. The right hon. Gentleman may like to use other examples, but the one he gave concerning Scotland was not relevant because the Security Service was not a party to that search. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that.

Mr. Hattersley: I understand the distinction that the Minister makes, but will he tell the House who did authorise the search made in Scotland?

Mr. Patten: It was made under the authority of a warrant from the magistrates court.

Mr. Hattersley: For the Minister to answer that the search "was made under the authority of a warrant" is not acceptable. If ours is a free and democratic society, an individual must have been responsible. Who authorised the raid on BBC Scotland?

Mr. Patten: It was done under the ordinary processes of existing Scottish law—*[Interruption.]* We shall have to continue debating that point, but I believe that the right hon. Gentleman has simply misunderstood the position of the magistrates' warrant, which has been stated in this House over and over again by my right hon. Friends.

The right hon. Member for Devonport raised another important point. He regretted the fact that the language of the Maxwell Fyfe instruction to the Security Service is lost. It is difficult to imagine putting declaratory language into statute law, which is not easy for parliamentary draftsmen to do. What we now have, if the House decides, is firm legislation in prospect. I rather agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the Maxwell Fyfe directive was expressed in firm and fine language but I assure the right hon. Gentleman that all the principles of the then Home Secretary Maxwell Fyfe are hallowed in the legislation—certainly the spirit of them is. Expressing them in the form in which they appear in the Bill is a necessary consequence of modernising non-statutory injunctions for the clear language of statute.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South, whose words I noted carefully, said that he thought the Bill was, in a sense, a good step forward. Equally, he deplored the language of the Bill. I regret that we cannot use Cranmer's English but must use draftsman's English. However, if anyone is responsible for infelicities it is the Ministers responsible for the Bill and not the parliamentary draftsmen, who do such an excellent job of advising us.

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend, in a somewhat stately minuet, attempted to lead me into being an all-out supporter of the Security Service Bill and of the new secrets legislation. I ask him to concentrate on one central question that he has not answered. This country, alone of all Western democracies, has rejected the concept of any form of independent oversight of the security services, relying instead on ministerial oversight of a type that has failed over the years. Why is that?

Mr. Patten: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister are personally responsible and answerable to this House. I may tell my hon. Friend that I was not trying unfairly to draw him into being a full-blown supporter of our excellent reforming legislation. At an earlier stage, I stated specifically, in respect of the promised Official Secrets Bill, that he may like to step a little in the direction we are going but that he might not necessarily like it all. I beg him not to imagine for one second that parliamentary or any other form of oversight of other European countries is necessarily thought to be wildly successful or treasured. Canada is an extremely good example of a country where there is strong and vigorous debate about the form of parliamentary oversight there.

Mr. Bermingham *rose*——

Mr. Patten: This will have to be the last time that I give way, but I promised the hon. Gentleman that I would do so.

Mr. Bermingham: In the light of the Minister's comments about ministerial responsibility and the Prime Minister now being responsbile for these matters—and indeed she is—will he give the House an undertaking that when the Bill comes before the House, and questions about security are asked of the Prime Minister, answers will be given?

Mr. Patten: For the whole time she has been Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend has been personally responsible for the security services in the same way as has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

I listened with close attention to the impassioned speech made by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). When he described Mr. Wright as being probably a much valued member of the security service I thought that he was taking leave of his grip on reality. the very idea is about as likely as the right hon. Gentleman being described as a much valued member of the Labour party by that party's Front Bench team.

Should anyone wish to continue listening to debates on security matters he can stay on after 10 pm to hear the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who, fortuitously and curiously, has secured an Adjournment debate on the Security Service, to which I look forward to replying.

The right hon. Member for Devonport mentioned the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 in an important passage of his speech. Anyone exercised by the restrictions on individual freedoms contained in the prevention of terrorism proposals should consider the freedoms that are threatened by terrorist organisations, notably by the IRA. It is they, not the Government, who murder and maim innocent people in their fruitless attempt to destroy the union which has been so much discussed in today's debate by Members from both sides of the water. The Government would be shirking their duty to protect citizens if they did not take firm action to help prevent acts of terrorism and bring terrorists to justice.

I hope that hon. Members will read carefully some of what the right hon. Member for Devonport said. I even hope that some of his words about the responsibilities of the media will be carried on the BBC programmes "Today in Parliament" and "Yesterday in Parliament". His words were very important and if they are not broadcast I hope they will be read widely in Broadcasting house. His remarks about the role and responsibility of the media were of considerable importance.

The hon. Member for Barking, my hon. Friends the Members for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) and for Thanet, South and the right hon. Member for Devonport all mentioned the importance of better protection for children and of the Bill dealing with that, which has not yet been published. It will honour the Government's White Paper commitment of 1987 to reform the law on child care and family services. It also takes account of Lord Justice Butler-Sloss's report on the Cleveland inquiry in the summer.

We have concluded that care orders—I refer particularly to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh—are no longer suitable as a disposal when a child is found guilty in criminal proceedings. I hope that there will be all-party assent to that. We found general support for this view when we consulted widely a few months ago. However, we intend to strengthen the courts' powers to make residence requirements in supervision orders in criminal proceedings. That is being done to put the child's interests first. As care orders will exclusively be civil proceedings in future, they should be handled in a court dedicated to civil business. That will provide the correct arena in which to hammer out these matters.

The Government intend to seek power to transfer care jurisdiction from the juvenile court to the domestic court. Our proposals, which include other changes in care jurisdiction, will lead on to wider reforms of family jurisdiction overall——

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Patten: No, if the hon. Lady will forgive me.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, in his long and interesting speech, gave a number of examples of ways in which he thought freedoms were being interfered with, and he ranged beyond Home Office issues. I shall answer the points that he mentioned in the same spirit. He talked first about education and the Government's reforming intentions towards higher education. That was of great interest to me because I represent a university constituency. I must tell him that the system of universities and of further and higher education, supported by the mixed mode of grants and loans that we propose, will make the most generous provision for students in further and higher education anywhere in the Western world.

The tragedy at the moment is that in social classes C2, D and E, which represent about 60 per cent. of all young people in this country, only about 20 per cent. of those of the right age group go to university. That is after 30 years of substantial grant funding. The right hon. Gentleman dismissed international comparisons entirely, but I must point out to him that in social democratic countries all over Europe, which have long had mixed grant and loan schemes, the participation rate in higher education is substantially higher than ours. The right hon. Gentleman also forgot that 180,000 more students are enjoying further and higher education now than in 1979, and that has been an additional freedom that has been conferred on them.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook should have listened more carefully to what the right hon. Member for Devonport said about freedom and broadcasting. That is the last time that I shall praise the right hon. Member for Devonport tonight. I do not wish him any harm. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook also asked a direct question

[Mr. Patten]

about when there will be a debate on the White Paper on broadcasting. That is not a matter for me, but for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who is on the Front Bench tonight.

I shall now deal with the points made by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook on crime and also with those made by his hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Callaghan). Their comments compare rather unfavourably with the measured and coherent views expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn). The right hon. Gentleman seems to dash into the crime issue and the Labour party seems to nibble round the edges of it and to have no coherent philosophy about handling crime. An example of that was the way in which the right hon. Gentleman addressed the crime figures.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said that crime was slowly coming down and that property crime in particular was coming down. Immediately there was some good news, the right hon. Gentleman could not criticise us for changes in the statistical base, so he said that it must mean that people were reporting crime less frequently than before. That is no praise for the 3,250,000 householders in neighbourhood watch schemes, who have contributed so much to the decline in the crime rate. The right hon. Gentleman simply does not care to ,put forward an intellectually coherent framework for his anti-crime policy.

If the *New Statesman* fulfils its promise, it will carry an excellent interview this week. Its journalists had their tape recorders on, and I had mine on. However, I must give the *New Statesman* a terrible warning. A few months ago I was asked to write for *New Society* and three weeks later it went bankrupt.

When dealing with policy figures, the right hon. Gentleman called only for more police. He did not suggest what should be done with them and did not balance the need for more police with the need for greater community action. Worst of all, he trotted out all those tired and intellectually bankrupt suggestions. We were told by the Labour party in 1979 that unemployment caused crime; in 1988 we are told that affluence causes crime. But what causes crime is people making a deliberate decision to be bad. The basis of any proper criminal policy is to try to understand why people decide to be bad. The Opposition have no answer, no policy and no understanding of the roots of criminality. They simply look for wild economic and social theories to justify——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Security Services (Prime Minister)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

10 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): We have discussed this afternoon the Security Service in general. I want to deal with a specific aspect of the same subject, the Prime Minister's statement on 6 May 1987 about the apparent inquiry within the Security Service into allegations made by Mr. Peter Wright. I shall try to demonstrate that the Prime Minister's statement was incorrect in every significant detail. It will provide us with an early opportunity to test the Prime Minister's assertion, made yesterday, that she and her right hon. Friend the Home Secretary are accountable to Parliament. I took the opportunity, in the hope of a substantive reply, of writing to the Prime Minister last week to tell her what specific subject I intended to address and of notifying the Minister's Office early this morning, in the hope of a substantive reply.

Two years ago Mr. Peter Wright, a former senior officer with MI5, published his memoirs. On page 369 he described what he claimed was a plan by himself and an unspecified number of other MI5 officers to discredit and perhaps bring down the Government of Harold Wilson in 1974. He wrote:

> "The plan was simple. In the run up to the election . . . MI5 would arrange for selective details of the intelligence about leading Labour Party figures, but especially Wilson, to be leaked to sympathetic pressmen. Using our contacts in the press and among union officials, word of the material contained in MI5 files, and the fact that Wilson was considered a security risk, would be passed round. Soundings in the office had already been taken and up to thirty officers had given their approval to the scheme. Facsimile copies of some files were to be made and distributed to overseas newspapers, and the matter was to be raised in Parliament for maximum effect."

Had such allegations been made in any other Western democracy, the resulting outcry would have led to a public inquiry. Had they been made in the United States, a country much admired by the Prime Minister, Congress would have launched the most thorough investigation. Those alleged to have been involved, be they never so mighty, would have been summoned to account for their actions.

In this country, however, the Government reacted differently. The judges were asked to intervene, and instantly obliged by banning the book. Injunctions were also taken out against newspapers that dared to print extracts and against booksellers who dared to stock the book. Millions of pounds of public money were squandered in a worldwide attempt at suppression, the effect of which was to make our country a laughing stock and Mr. Wright a millionaire.

So great was the outcry, however, that even the Prime Minister was unable to resist demands that she should at least go through the motions of an inquiry. The result was that on 6 May last year she made a statement to the House, in which she said:

> "I can . . . tell the House that the director-general"—

who was at that time Sir Antony Duff—

> ". . . has reported to me that, over the last four months, he has conducted a thorough investigation . . . There has been a comprehensive examination of all the papers relevant to that

> time. There have been interviews with officers in post in the relevant parts of the security service at that time, including officers whose names have been made public.
>
> "The director-general has advised me that he has found no evidence of any truth in the allegations. He has given me his personal assurance that the stories are false. In particular, he has advised me that all the security service officers who have been interviewed have categorically denied that they were involved in, or were aware of, any activities or plans to undermine or discredit Lord Wilson and his Government when he was Prime Minister. The then director-general"—

who I believe was Sir Michael Hanley—

> "has categorically denied the allegation that he confirmed the existence within the security service of a disaffected faction with extreme Right-wing views. He has further stated that he had no reason to believe that any such faction existed. No evidence or indication has been found of any plot or conspiracy against Lord Wilson by or within the security service.
>
> Further, the director-general has also advised me that Lord Wilson has never been the subject of a security service investigation or of any form of electronic or other surveillance by the security service."—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1987; Vol. 115, c. 724.]

You would have had to fall off a Christmas tree from a great height, Mr. Speaker, to believe that statement. It is incorrect in every significant detail, and that is what I propose to try to demonstrate.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mullin: Forgive me. I have prepared quite carefully and I want to try to get my speech on the record.

Happily, we are not obliged to rely on Peter Wright. There has recently been published an excellent book by *The Observer* journalist Mr. David Leigh entitled, "The Wilson Plot", based on interviews with five former members of the Security Service. It shows that there was, indeed, an attempt by the security services over many years to discredit the Government formed by Lord Wilson.

Furthermore, it appears that Mr. Leigh has had better luck than the Prime Minister in securing the co-operation of members of the security services with regard to this matter. That, if nothing else, ought to concern the Prime Minister as she is supposed to be in charge of the security services. Nor do we have to rely on Mr. Leigh. His findings are corroborated by the distinguished journalist, Mr. John Ware, in a recent "Panorama" programme. It is true that Mr. Ware demonstrated that Mr. Wright may have exaggerated the number of people involved in the project and understated his own involvement. Mr. Ware also had no difficulty demonstrating the utterly misleading nature of the Prime Minister's statement. He even went so far as to show that word of what was going on had reached the American intelligence services, although not, apparently, No. 10 Downing street.

In addition to the work of Messrs. Leigh and Ware, there are books by several others which to a greater or lesser degree confirm that the Prime Minister has been grossly misled by the security services. They are the collected works of Mr. Chapman Pincher, "The Pencourt File" by Barrie Penrose and Roger Courtier, and the memoirs of the former MI6 officer Mr. Anthony Cavendish, which were also banned.

I propose to examine the Prime Minister's statement of 6 May last year in the light of information which has become available since then. She told the House:

> "There has been a comprehensive examination of all the papers relevant to that time."

I do not think that any of us is naive enough to imagine that anyone involved in activities of the kind alleged would be foolish enough to write them all down and file the papers away in the MI5 registry for future generations of historians or leakers. I would like to know whether the papers examined included the "Henry Worthington" file. There are no prizes for guessing that "Henry Worthington" was MI5-speak for Harold Wilson.

The Prime Minister said:

> "There have been interviews with officers in post in the relevant parts of the security service at that time, including officers whose names have been made public."—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1987; Vol. 115, c. 724.]

Students of official statements will note the careful reference to "officers in post". The problem is that most of those who were alleged to have been involved in, or were aware of, what was going on departed the service of MI5 and MI6 before the commencement of this alleged inquiry.

To name but a few, Arthur Martin retired in or around 1970, Patrick Stewart retired not long after, Barry Russell-Jones left in 1981, Tony Brooks and Jeremy Wetherall left in 1978, Charles Elwell left in 1979, Harry Wharton left in 1980, Harold Doyne Ditmus, Michael McCaul, Ray Whitby and Robert Holden have also retired, James Speirs of MI6 left the service in 1986 and Peter Troughton left in or about 1978. The only one who to my knowledge is still serving is Mollie Sugden. All those people could have assisted with inquiries. It would be interesting to know from the Minister how many were interviewed. I suspect that the answer is none.

Incidentally, the obvious starting point for any serious inquiry would have been the one man who admits to being aware of and involved in the smearing of Harold Wilson. Peter Wright has made himself readily available to just about everyone who has knocked on his door in the past few years, but I understand that no attempt was made to interview him either during the 1987 inquiry or during the previous one carried out 10 years earlier at the request of the former Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan.

Mr. Aitken: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mullin: No. The Minister will have an opportunity to reply in a moment.

That fact alone speaks volumes.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not a flagrant breach of the privileges of the House for the hon. Gentleman to be making all these unfounded and scurrilous accusations against named individuals who are not in a position to defend themselves? Would you call on him to withdraw his allegations?

Mr. Speaker: Every hon. Member must take responsibility for what he says in the House. We have freedom of speech here. However, I must say to the hon. Gentleman—I am sure that he is very well aware of it—that I trust that he will not seek to mention names of serving officers whose work or lives may be in danger.

Mr. Mullin: With one possible exception, every one of those names has been published widely outside. I do not think that there is anything controversial in what I have said, and we should not allow ourselves to be distracted by those who attempt to make a controversy out of something that is not controversial and who, I suspect, have an interest in distracting us from the main burden of the debate tonight.

[Mr. Mullin]

The Prime Minister said in her statement:

> "all the security service officers who have been interviewed have categorically denied that they were involved in, or aware of, any activities or plans to undermine or discredit Lord Wilson and his Government".—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1987; Vol. 115, c. 724.]

If that is so, one can only conclude that the wrong people were interviewed or that those interviewed were, as the saying goes, economical with the truth. I make no allegation as to who was involved, but most of the 30 or so MI5 and MI6 officers who served with Peter Wright in the K5 branch of the intelligence service at Gower street in the early 1970s must have at least been aware of what was going on. Indeed, some of them obviously talked frankly to David Leigh.

Many others also knew. It must have been common gossip in certain sections of the security services. Jeremy Wetherall and Harry Wharton are said to have had in their possession an entirely innocent picture of Harold Wilson, accompanied by a young woman, taken many years ago in Moscow. Apparently that photograph came from MI6. What were they doing with it, and why was it being circulated?

Anthony Cavendish, the former MI6 officer, had also heard stories about Wilson, even though at that time he was not employed by the intelligence services. Who told him? None other than the late head of MI6, Sir Maurice Oldfield. In his banned memoirs, "Inside Intelligence", Cavendish says:

> "It was also very clear to me from the things he said that Maurice was somehow involved in the sudden departure of Harold Wilson from the premiership."

In 1974 and 1975, someone in MI5 was clearly feeding Patrick Marnham of *Private Eye* very detailed material which seemed to have come from the "Harry Worthington" file which was kept locked in a safe in the office of the director-general. Sources in the intelligence service were also feeding to the journalist Chapman Pincher a stream of malicious gossip about Wilson, his Ministers and Labour Members of Parliament over a period of years. It is well known that one of Pincher's sources was Lord Rothschild; the identity of the others is unclear.

Other journalists, notably Mr. William Massie of Express Newspapers, were being fed from the same trough. It is still going on. As recently as February 14 this year, Mr. Massie published in the *Sunday Express* a 23-year-old picture that clearly came from intelligence sources under the banner headline "Labour MP and the Girl Reds". Who is doing that and why? Clearly it cannot be the work of a lone nut like Peter Wright, who has long retired. Clearly the leaks are sanctioned from a high level. Clearly those responsible do not feel in any way threatened by the furore that has surrounded the publication of Peter Wright's memoirs.

I should be grateful if the Minister would address himself specifically to the photograph in the *Sunday Express* on 14 February this year. Who leaked and why?

The Americans, it seems, were also well aware of the allegations being circulated about Wilson. As long ago as 1963, the head of the CIA, John McCone, reported to President Kennedy that there was concern about Harold Wilson. The source for this is McCone's staff officer Walter Elder, interviewed recently by John Ware. As early as 1963 Peter Wright and Arthur Martin of MI5 were peddling a ludicrous story that Gaitskell had been assassinated by the Russians in order to clear the way for Harold Wilson. It is surprising that no word of this came to the ears of Sir Antony Duff's inquiry, since it clearly reached many other ears.

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a continual stream of black propaganda, not only about Harold Wilson but about members of his Government, being fed by the intelligence services to tame journalists. There can scarcely be anyone in Fleet street or in Westminster who did not know where the propaganda was coming from. It is simply not credible for the Prime Minister to assert, as she did, that no one in the intelligence services was aware of a plot to discredit Harold Wilson and his Government.

In her statement of 6 May, the Prime Minister said:

> "The then director-general"—

presumably a reference to Sir Michael Hanley, Jumbo to his friends—

> "has categorically denied . . . that he confirmed the existence within the security service of a disaffected faction with extreme Right-wing views. He has further stated that he had no reason to believe that any such faction existed."

I understand that in the summer of 1975 Harold Wilson called in the late head of MI6, Sir Maurice Oldfield, and asked him about the widely rumoured plots by members of MI5 to discredit him. Oldfield said he knew of these. There was a section of MI5 which was unreliable. Sir Maurice, of course, is dead, but both Chapman Pincher and Anthony Cavendish have testified that Sir Maurice told them of this meeting with Wilson. Peter Wright says the same on page 371 of "Spycatcher". The journalist Barrie Penrose says he heard about it from Harold Wilson himself. That makes four good witnesses.

On the afternoon of 7 August 1975, Wilson is then said to have summoned Sir Michael Hanley and put to him what Oldfield had said. Wilson told the journalist Barrie Penrose that Hanley confirmed that there was a dissident group within MI5. Presumably this was a reference to Mr. Wright and his friends. Hanley is also said to have named a man in MI6 who had been part of this group. He is said to have claimed that the problem had by this time been cleared up. Chapman Pincher also says that Wilson told him about the conversation with Hanley.

Perhaps the Minister will address himself to one simple point: did such a meeting between Wilson and Hanley take place in 1975, or was it a figment of Harold Wilson's imagination? The House will note that the Prime Minister's statement was silent on this point. If such a conversation did take place, perhaps Sir Michael Hanley would care to place on record his version of it. I challenge him to do so.

Sir Michael has other questions to answer. What does he have to say about Peter Wright's account of a meeting Wright had with Hanley in the summer of 1975? According to Wright, he called on Hanley at the suggestion of Maurice Oldfield. Wright says:

> "When I saw Hanley the next morning he went as white as a sheet. He might have suspected that feelings against Wilson ran high in the office, but now he was learning that half of his staff were up to their necks in a plot to get rid of the Prime Minister . . . Ironically, his first reaction was anger with Maurice. 'Bloody Maurice', he raged. 'Poking his nose into our business.' When he calmed down he asked me for the names. I gave them. Having come so far I could not very well refuse."

What is Hanley's version of this conversation that Wright says took place? Does he say that it never took place? If so, how does that square with the cryptic note that he sent to Wright shortly after Wright retired to Australia? That note says:

"The firm has passed its recent examinations and is doing rather well."

Was that supposed to indicate that MI5 had bluffed, or lied, its way through the inquiry commissioned by Lord Callaghan in 1977? It simply is not credible for the Prime Minister to pretend that Sir Michael Hanley knew nothing.

Finally, and most outrageous of all, the Prime Minister said in her statement:

"the director-general has also advised me that Lord Wilson has never been the subject of a security service investigation".—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1987; Vol. 115, c. 724.]

If that is so, how do we explain the "Henry Worthington" file—a file so sensitive that it was kept permanently in a safe in the director-general's office? The directors-general who had charge of this file were Sir Martin Furnival Jones and, later, our old friend Sir Michael Hanley. What is Sir Michael's position on this? That no such file existed? That he was unaware of the contents of his own safe?

I suspect that I can guess the answer. No doubt Sir Michael and his successor, Sir Antony Duff, would, if pressed, adopt the legalistic but incredible position that "Henry Worthington" was a subject and not a personal file and that its contents concerned not Harold Wilson but his friends. If that is so, perhaps they would care to explain the origin of the code name on the front cover and why, if it was about Harold Wilson's friends, its contents could not be filed according to normal practice in the main registry under the names of the individuals concerned.

Peter Wright said that the file had grown to four volumes by the time he retired. It had an index and minutes on the left-hand side and sheaves of source reports stapled together on the right. We do not have to rely on Peter Wright's word alone for the existence of that file. Another former member of MI5's K branch saw a volume of the file in the mid-1970s. It apparently contained material supplied by MI6 about Wilson's friends and his journeys to the Soviet Union.

I am not concerned with the contents of the file or with the fact that such a file was kept. It is a matter of record that Harold Wilson had some dubious associates, and there may well have been good reason for the Security Service to take an interest in some of their activities. I do not quarrel with that, although I note that nothing was ever proved against any of them. I am concerned that, over many years, the contents of that file and others have been systematically leaked for political purposes and that, when challenged, successive director-generals of the security services have chosen to pretend either that no such file existed or that, if it did, it did not constitute an investigation of Harold Wilson. Plainly that is a lie, and the Prime Minister, no doubt unwittingly, has been placed in the position of having to pass that lie on to the House of Commons.

10.21 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): To suggest that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was lying to the House of Commons was monstrous. If that was what the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said——

Mr. Mullin: No.

Mr. Patten: I am relieved to hear that the hon. Gentleman did not say that.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) had said that, I would certainly have intervened.

Mr. Patten: Very well, Mr. Speaker.

Much of the rest of the hon. Gentleman's speech was equally monstrous. In my more charitable moments, I simply reflect that the hon. Gentleman has a view of the world whereby he says, "It is all a plot." In my less charitable moments, I think other things which it is best not to bring before the House.

I would have enjoyed——

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Answer.

Mr. Patten: I shall answer in my own way, and I am just about to do so.

I would have enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Sunderland, South more if he had found the time to acknowledge the difficult and sometimes dangerous task accepted by the members of the Security Service and the debt that we all owe to them for their skill, hard work and loyalty. I am happy to reaffirm Her Majesty's Government's support for and confidence in the services.

We have a number of debates ahead of us on our proposals for legislation, and I can predict, I think accurately, that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South will contribute to them. I hope that, before he raises the names of more people—all those names that came tumbling out under the cover of parliamentary privilege—perhaps smearing the reputations of the individuals who he has named, he will reflect on his behaviour before following the same course in the proceedings on the Security Service Bill.

There was nothing in what the hon. Gentleman said on these issues that invalidates in any way the statements by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Mr. Wright was cited. Mr. Wright has shown himself to be entirely unreliable as a witness to the truth. His only supporter in the Chamber was earlier this afternoon, characteristically, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). There was nothing in what the hon. Member for Sunderland, South said and there is certainly nothing that is contained in the book by Mr. David Leigh, to which he referred, that can seriously be regarded as any ground for introducing any special inquiry.

The contents of Mr. Leigh's book are not new. There is nothing in it that causes the Government to wish to modify the conclusions in the statement by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that there is no evidence to substantiate suggestions that members of the security services plotted against Lord Wilson when he was Prime Minister.

Mr. Aitken: The whole thesis put forward by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullen) was emphatically denied by Mr. Wright, who said on television that there was no plot consisting of 30 people; it was only himself and perhaps one other member of the Security Service. Therefore, from the lips of Mr. Peter Wright himself came the contradiction which negated the whole thrust of the argument made by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South today.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend has got the hon. Member for Sunderland, South with both barrels. The hon.

[Mr. Patten]

Member for Sunderland, South believes that everything is a plot and simply makes up a whole set of unrelated issues, weaving them together into a great fabric to show that nameless persons are seeking to overthrow the stability of the state. It is a lot of unmitigated claptrap. I believe that I can prove that by going through the reporting functions which exist for the Security Service.

At the heart of the system is the principle, which I believe is well understood by most sensible Members on both sides, of ministerial responsibility. The director-general of the Security Service—whose responsibility we now propose to embody in legislation, as ~~my~~ right hon. Friend the Home Secretary ~~said today~~—is personally responsible to the Home Secretary for the work of the service and will remain so under the proposed legislation. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary exercises the responsibility that this entails for him with his customary care and vigour.

The Home Secretary, of course, has a very thorough knowledge of the priorities of the service. He is responsible for ensuring that it has the resources that it needs to carry out its work, and he must satisfy himself personally that those resources are used effectively. The Home Secretary is continually informed and consulted about matters concerning the management and work of the service. Those responsibilities are exercised through a regular series of meetings which can be supplemented by other meetings as required. The director-general is responsible for presenting an annual report covering the whole range of the service's activities and the report always produces a full discussion between the director-general and the Home Secretary.

Those who seek to criticise the procedures—it is that criticism which underlies so much of what the hon. Member for Sunderland, South has said—must first acknowledge that, when the Home Secretary asks the House to accept that he is satisfied that the service is proceeding properly with its difficult work in the interests of us all, he does so on the basis of a very full programme of activity and discussion between himself and the service. There is nothing new in that. It went on, of course, under the Labour Government.

I have started with the relationship between the Security Service and the Home Secretary, but that is not the whole picture. The Prime Minister is also personally involved and personally informed, because the Prime Minister remains responsible for the overall security policy to which the Security Service contributes. Under Governments of both political colours, the arrangements have traditionally recognised that the director-general may have access to the Prime Minister directly on major security issues affecting the safety of the country. Again, there are regular meetings, and the director-general knows that access to the Prime Minister is always available to him. The Prime Minister sees his annual report on the service. She, too, is consulted on the service's priorities and she must be satisfied that the work of the security and intelligence community as a whole is properly and effectively co-ordinated. She must also, of course, decide on the best use and allocation of resources among all those involved.

In discharging those responsibilities, my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary, other senior Secretaries of State, the Cabinet Secretary and other senior officials, as well as the heads of the security and intelligence services, are all involved. Again, no one can doubt the breadth and depth of the responsibility for the service that is shared by the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South made a number of serious allegations, using—as, alas, he normally does—the cloak of parliamentary privilege to mention names. Let us pause to consider whether the evidence that he has adduced supports any general criticism of the arrangements for briefing the Prime Minister—the subject of his Adjournment debate. The House has a proper and necessary rule that questions about security matters relating to the security services are not in order, but the Government have been quick to come to the House with full statements on security matters, as I pointed out in today's debate on the Gracious Speech.

There is a full public record to which we can refer. Some hon. Members will recall that during the Anthony Blunt affair some years ago the Prime Minister gave an extremely full account, the fullest account ever, both of the background to the case and of the principles to be applied in dealing with the Security Service——

The Motion having been made at Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 24 November 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Business of the House

2.34 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): As the House is aware the debate on the Address in reply to the Gracious Speech will be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 29 November.

At the end on Monday 28 November, motion to take note of EC documents relating to transport infrastructure and aids to combined transport. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

The business for the remainder of next week will be as follows:

WEDNESDAY 30 NOVEMBER—Until about seven o'clock Second Reading of the Petroleum Royalties (Relief) and Continental Shelf Bill.

Afterwards, a debate on procedure on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Details of relevant Procedure Committee reports will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion to take note of EC documents relating to milk quotas and New Zealand butter. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 1 DECEMBER—Motion to take note of EC documents relating to fisheries arrangements for 1989. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

Motion to take note of EC document relating to summer time arrangements. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 2 DECEMBER—There will be a debate on the House of Commons (Services) Committee's first report Session 1987-88 on the new parliamentary building (phase 2) (HC 561) on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 5 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Bill.

Motion relating to the Scottish Affairs Select Commitee.

[Monday 28 November 1988

Relevant European Community Documents

(a) 7325/88	*Transport Infrastructure Programme*
(b) 6047/88	*Combined Transport (National Aids)*

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 43-xxxv (1987-88) para 4
(b) HC 43-xxxv (1987-88) para 3

Wednesday 30 November 1988

Relevant European Community Documents

(a) 8108/88	*Milk Quota: Compensation for outgoers*
(b) 8961/88	*New Zealand Butter*

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 43-xxxviii (1987-88) para 3
(b) HC 43-xxxix (1987-88) para 7

Thursday 1 December

Fisheries Debate

Relevant European Comunity Documents

(a) unnumbered	*Fisheries: Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and Quotas 1989*
(b) unnumbered	*Reciprocal fisheries agreement with Norway 1989*
(c) 9185/88	*Fish Guide Prices*
(d) unnumbered	*Greenland Fishery Quotas 1989*
(e) unnumbered	*North West Atlantic Fisheries (NAFO)*
(f) unnumbered	*Fisheries: Norwegian Waters Catch Quota Amendment 1988*

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 15-i (1988-89) para 6
(b) HC 15-i (1988-89) para 16
(c) HC 15-i (1988-89) para 4
(d) HC 15-i (1988-89) para 14
(e) HC 15-i (1988-89) para 15
(f) HC 43-xxxvi (1987-88) para 19

Summer time debate—

Relevant European Community Document

(a) 7876/88	*Summer Time*

Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 43-xxxviii (1987-88) para 1

Debate on Procedure Wednesday 30 November:

Relevant House of Commons Procedure Committee Reports—

Second Report, Session 1984-85 (HC 49) on Public Bill Procedure

Second Report, Session 1985-86 (HC 324) on Allocation of time for Public Bills in Standing Committee

First Report, Session 1986-87 (HC 157) on a Parliamentary Calendar

Second Report, Session 1986-87 (HC 350) on the use of time on the floor of the House

Third Report, Session 1986-87 (HC 254) on Early Day Motions

Fourth Report, Session 1986-87 (HC 373) on the work of the Committee.]

Mr. Dobson: I thank the Leader of the House for his answer, although, on the basis of what he announced, it appears that he and I will feature rather heavily next week.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman that he promised us a half-day debate on the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, whether it is set up or not, and it is unsatisfactory, that half a day should begin at 10 o'clock in the evening. We would like the debate to start earlier, or we shall feel that he has not honoured his promise.

[Mr. Dobson]

When the right hon. Gentleman is considering the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, may I ask him to reconsider his position, as enunciated until now, that there is no way on earth in which he can get enough Tories to serve on the Committe to allow it to be established. He and the Tory party owe it to the people of Scotland to establish the Committee under the Standing Orders of the House, and they should use the famous discipline of the Tory Whips to ensure that they get enough members of that Committee.

Will the House be given an opportunity to debate the purchase of the next generation of tanks before the Cabinet comes to a decision, and especially before the Cabinet comes to a decision to sell British industry down the river and buy American to make us fit in better in Washington?

When may we expect a debate on the housing crisis? The debate on the last Friday of the previous Session was postponed to permit debate on the Housing Bill, now the Housing Act 1988, which will make the homelessness crisis even worse.

When will the House be given an opportunity to debate the Fennell report on the King's Cross fire and its implications for the safety of railway passengers?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Prime Minister to come to the House to make a statement and answer questions to clear up the discrepancy between her denial that there was any discussion of her stopping the Queen accepting an invitation to the Soviet Union and the off-the-record briefing by her press secretary, Mr. Bernard Ingham, which said the opposite? They cannot both be right. We know that, according to the rules of the House, the Prime Minister cannot be a liar. Therefore, Mr. Bernard Ingham must be. She should explain to the House how this happened.

Mr. Wakeham: I think that that was five questions and a little bit of a whinge. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman and I will be featuring rather a lot in next week's business. I regret that as much as he does, but we shall have to do our best to keep going through the week.

With regard to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, I note the hon. Gentleman's views about the timing of the debate that I have announced and, in view of what he said, I shall look at the matter again. I am sure that we shall be able to reach a satisfactory arrangement if there are further discussions through the usual channels. On the substance of the matter, it is probably better to wait for the debate, but I have to say that I do not recognise the situation as the hon. Gentleman enunciated it.

I note what the hon. Gentleman said about tanks. There has been a useful first discussion on that difficult procurement matter, but no decisions were reached as further work is required.

The hon. Gentleman will know that the debate on homelessness did not take place because we had to debate the timetable motion on the Housing Bill. Therefore, I cannot promise an early debate. I recognise that this is a matter to which we shall have to return, but, subject to your views, Mr. Speaker, homelessness may well be a relevant subject for Monday's debate.

I recognise the hon. Gentleman's considerable concern about the report on the King's Cross fire and the need for a debate, but the matter can best be discussed through the usual channels.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's question about my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and what is alleged by some people to have taken place, I have nothing further to add to what the Prime Minister said last week.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the profound disappointment that many of us feel that the Government have not yet seen fit to introduce their promised legislation on embryo experimentation. He will be aware that the Warnock committee, which first broached the subject, reported four years ago, that the White Paper was produced last year and that on the two occasions that the House has had the opportunity to vote on the subject it has voted overwhelmingly against experimentation. Is he aware that at present experiments are taking place in laboratories throughout Britain? Against that background, will he arrange for a Minister to explain to the House why legislation on this subject cannot be introduced in this Session?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise my right hon. Friend's deep concern, which is shared by many hon. Members. I know that he will be disappointed that it was not possible to announce in the Queen's Speech the legislation that he so urgently requires. We had difficult choices to make and I am sure that he will welcome the children's Bill, an important piece of social legislation, that we did announce. However, I have taken note of what my right hon. Friend says and I shall see what I can do about further explanation.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Given the comments made by the Leader of the House a few moments ago, can we expect the motion relating to the Scottish Affairs Select Committee to be in favour of setting up such a Committee rather than against it?

Has the Leader of the House had the opportunity of reading early-day motions 9 to 19, 27 to 31, 33 to 36 and 41? They contrast the Government's inaction on environmental issues and the action by Social and Liberal Democrat groups in a number of local authorities reflecting local concerns about the environment. I accept that the environment will be a subject for the debate on the Loyal Address next Monday, but does the Leader of the House accept that that is an inadequate substitute for legislation dealing with some of the matters raised in those early-day motions?

Mr. Wakeham: With regard to the Scottish Affairs Select Committee debate, the hon. Gentleman will have to wait until the motion on that subject is tabled. I hope that it will commend itself to the House. I do not think that I can say any more about that.

I have noted the early-day motions tabled by the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends. I congratulate them on their energy in doing so. It is easier to table motions than to do all the things for the environment that are required. The Government have a good record. Subject to catching your eye, Mr. Speaker, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will speak on that subject on Monday and no doubt will give a good account of himself.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I welcome the long overdue debate on procedure, to be held on Wednesday evening. If it is to be on a motion for the Adjournment, presumably no decisions will be taken. If, during the debate, my right hon. Friend realises that there is general support for at least some of the recommendations that the Procedure Committee has discussed, will he assure me that there will be an opportunity for the House to vote on and implement the recommendations without further delay?

Mr. Wakeham: I think that my hon. Friend, who is fair about the matter, will have recognised that quite a few recommendations of the Procedure Committee have already been implemented, so we have made a start. It is important that we should get as much agreement in the House as we can on others before we make some of the fundamental changes that are recommended. I shall listen to the debate and to the views expressed in all sections of the House. I hope that I shall get a clear steer as to what the House would like to do. We had better wait until that debate to decide how best to proceed afterwards.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): When the Leader of the House gave his earlier answer about any advice given to Her Majesty the Queen by the Prime Minister about the prospective visit to Moscow, he seemed to imply that that was not a proper matter for discussion in the House. Will he clarify that? Is it not the case that, although of course the monarch must accept the advice of the Prime Minister on such matters, there is nothing in the British constitution that suggests that Her Majesty the Queen should be subjected to insults from Mr. Bernard Ingham and the office at No. 10? As a gross discourtesy has occurred, is it not the case that the proper way for an apology to be made is by the Prime Minister to the House of Commons?

Mr. Wakeham: Either the right hon. Gentleman decided to ask that question before I gave my answer or he was not listening to me because I said that I had nothing to add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in her speech earlier this week, when she said that no such meeting or discussion had taken place. That is the position, and I have nothing to add to that.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend will be aware that last week a most significant move was made in European defence by Spain and Portugal signing to join the Western European Union, which is the European pillar of NATO. Should we not discuss burden sharing and collaboration between the nine nations on European defence?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It seems to me that the subject is totally appropriate to tomorrow's debate. I hope that my hon. Friend will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Will the right hon. Gentleman find time to debate the Barlow Clowes affair and the Department of Trade and Industry's interest in it?

Mr. Wakeham *rose*——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The piece of paper is just behind the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) is trying to be helpful, as always. I shall read what is on the piece of paper when I have sat down to see whether I have said the wrong thing.

This is a serious matter. I am well aware of the concern of many hon. Members about that case. I understand the interest behind the early-day motion and the question asked by the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay). The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration has decided to investigate complaints about the case and my noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is co-operating fully with him. I am not convinced that a debate at present would serve a useful purpose. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made a full statement on 20 October.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): May we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or a debate on Northern Ireland, which we have been promised time and again, so that we can have an explanation of the reference in the Queen's Speech to the proposal to give elected representatives greater involvement in the Province?

Mr. Wakeham: I know that there is a desire to have a debate on Northern Ireland, and I recognise the need for one, but when would be the best time for it is a matter of judgment. My hon. Friend, with his ingenuity, could fit the matter either into tomorrow's debate or, possibly, into the debate on Monday 5 December. He has several opportunities to make his points.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): Is the Leader of the House aware that yesterday it was stated in the other place that the Second Reading of the football membership Bill is likely to take place there on 23 January? Can he confirm that? Can he tell us when the Bill will be published, because it will require detailed study? When I telephoned the office of the Minister for Sport this morning his staff had not the faintest idea when it would be published and did not know that it was having its Second Reading in another place on the date that I have given. Can the Leader of the House bring some order out of this chaos?

Mr. Wakeham: I have enough difficulty organising the business in this House without also having to organise it in the other House. I recognise the right hon. Gentleman's concern and I shall make it my job to check up and to ensure that he receives the earliest indication possible.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May I support calls for an early debate on homelessness so that I may put to the House the concern of my constituents that the Labour-controlled Ealing council abolished residents' points immediately on taking office in May 1986 when there were 30 homeless families on the council register with the effect that 1,200 families have now been attracted onto the homeless list at a cost to taxpayers and ratepayers of £14 million a year with no honest prospect of rehousing them in the near future? May I put it to my right hon. Friend that a debate is needed——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has asked for a debate. He may not make debating points.

Mr. Greenway: A debate is needed so that I can put to the House the concern of people born and bred in Ealing and those who have lived there for some time because they cannot be housed on account of that policy, which even the Labour-dominated Association of London Authorities has repudiated.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the importance of my hon. Friend's question and the subject, but I cannot say more than I have already said about a debate on homelessness. I had occasion to visit Ealing not long ago, and the first question everybody asked me was whether I knew Harry, and I said I did.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Will the Leader of the House, recognising both the thousands of students outside this building who are being refused permission to lobby their Members of Parliament and the fact that Members of Parliament are being refused permission to cross Westminster bridge, which is sealed, provide time next week for a full day's debate on student grants and loans, which are rightly causing so much concern among the student population? To say that that can be debated in the debate on the Loyal Address would be seen as undemocratic by students and others outside the House as well as by hon. Members.

Mr. Wakeham: I thank the hon. Gentleman for asking me a question and telling me that the answer is unsatisfactory before I have given it. I shall not say that we should debate the matter necessarily in the Queen's Speech debate, although I guess that it would be in order. The Government have issued a White Paper on the subject of top-up loans. It is right for people to express their views and we shall undoubtedly find the right opportunity to return to the subject in the House in due course.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): My right hon. Friend will be aware that in the last Session more than 200 hon. Members supported early-day motion 1119 on reparations for the people who were imprisoned by the Japanese in the last war.

[That this House, in welcoming the growing friendship between Japan and the United Kingdom, believes that this friendship will not fully blossom until the wrongs done during the Second World War to Allied prisoners are fully accepted by the Japanese Government and due reparation made.]

I wonder whether my right hon. Friend will find the time among all the debates on forward-looking legislation to look back at the debt that we owe those people. Does he believe that we should rightly be putting pressure on the Japanese Government, as it took six months to obtain a reply to a letter sent to the Japanese Prime Minister saying that the Japanese did not intend doing anything for the people concerned? Time is surely running out. The constituent for whom I took up the matter has unfortunately died as a result of the treatment that he received from the Japanese.

Mr. Wakeham: I know that my hon. Friend feels strongly about this subject, which he has raised before. I believe that these matters may not have been dealt with as satisfactorily as he would like, but they were part of the negotiated peace treaty. I shall refer my hon. Friend's points to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and ask him to write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): As to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, I support the comment of my hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House that a debate starting at 10 o'clock will not be acceptable. If the Leader of the House is having difficulty, along with the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, in finding English Tory Members to serve on the Committee, I draw to his attention the fact that 17 to 19 English Tory Members regularly attend Scottish Question Time. If the Leader of the House asks them, he may find that they are willing to serve on the Committee on behalf of Scottish Tories.

Mr. Wakeham: I told the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) that I will look at the matter again and that I believe it will be possible to reach a satisfactory arrangement through the proper channels, and I stand by that.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Has my right hon. Friend read the *Official Report* of the Prime Minister's speech on the first day of our debate on the Loyal Address and that of the Leader of the Opposition? Did he note that, according to *Hansard*, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was interrupted eight times——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is business question time, and the hon. Member should be asking for a debate next week on a particular subject.

Mr. Shaw: If you will bear with me, Mr. Speaker, I shall ask for a debate. There ought to be an early debate on the Leader of the Opposition's performance, which was so boring that it was not interrupted at all. There should be a debate on the Opposition's behaviour, which was so appalling that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was interrupted eight times. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will do everything he can to improve the Opposition's standards.

Mr. Wakeham: Not only did I read both speeches in the *Official Report* but was present when they were made and listened to them. It may be that my hon. Friend is correct in saying that the Prime Minister's speech was a little more interesting and had more content than that of the Leader of the Opposition, but that is not for me to judge. Questions of order are a matter for you, Mr. Speaker, and not for me. However, if my hon. Friend is concerned about such matters, he may be able to contribute to our debate on procedure.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I shall call those right hon. and hon. Members who are rising to their feet, but the Chair has a long list of speakers for the subsequent debate. A number of right hon. and hon. Members were disappointed at not being called last night, so I hope that remaining business questions will be confined to next week's business and will not concern general matters and debating points.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Is the Leader of the House completely unaware of the continuing grave crisis in the National Health Service caused by the Government's failure to handle satisfactorily the regrading review? May we have a ministerial statement next week or, more important, ministerial action to eradicate the anomaly, for example, whereby two people may do basically the same job but one of them receives more than £1,000 per year less than the other? The Government ought to take immediate action to ensure a fair deal for nurses and other NHS employees and to stop victimising them for simply fulfilling their contracts by working to grade.

Mr. Wakeham: I am interested, once again, in the fact that the hon. Gentleman seems to be out of step with members of his own Front Bench. There are to be six days of debate on the Loyal Address. The Opposition choose the subjects for debate. They have not chosen the National Health Service, and I know perfectly well why.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): In view of the important impending negotiations with the American Government, will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on better access for transatlantic flights to Manchester airport?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that that is an important subject. I cannot promise a debate in the near future, but we may be able to find time for one.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The Leader of the House will not be surprised to know that there is much concern in Leeds about the order for the Chieftain tank. At risk are 850 jobs in the city and its environs because Vickers has taken over the Royal Ordnance factory in Leeds. The Prime Minister said on Tuesday in the debate on the Loyal Address that she did not expect that it would be long before a decision was taken. The Leader of the House has said what he has said today. I shall be questioned a great deal in Leeds over the coming weekend about what is going on, and so will hon. Members on both sides of the House. What is the argument about? Why is it taking time? Can we not join in the discussion? It is important that we know what the difficulties are.

Mr. Wakeham: The right hon. Gentleman is very experienced in these matters. He knows perfectly well that a major procurement order of this kind has to be considered very carefully. There has been a useful first discussion about this very difficult matter. No decision has been reached because further work is required. When the right hon. Gentleman was a Cabinet Member, I am sure that he believed that that was the right way to proceed. Now, with the freedom of the Back Benches, he says other things that are perhaps a little more extravagant.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Leader of the House recall that a few days ago he sent me a letter in response to a matter that was raised during questions on last week's business statement about the methane gas that was escaping in my Bolsover constituency as a result of the closure earlier this year of the Arkwright pit? Does he also recall that in that letter he said that British Coal was expected to accept liability for certain matters? As yet, it has not accepted liability and the 40 families who were evacuated have lost considerable sums of money. I should like the Leader of the House to tell the Secretary of State for Energy, to whom he referred in the letter, to come to the Dispatch Box and explain why British Coal is allowed to act in this fashion. It closed the pit but failed properly to seal off the methane gas, with the result that 40 families have been scattered round north Derbyshire. Let us have a statement from the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Wakeham: I remember the occasion and the letter very well, but the hon. Gentleman probably does not know the facts and I shall tell him what they are. I understand that British Coal's actions have reduced the methane gas escape to safe levels and that the evacuated families are now returning to their homes. British Coal has offered to make ex gratia payments to compensate householders for inconvenience and disturbance and it has already made interim payments to each household.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a debate next week on local government democracy, when we could discuss the way in which the Conservative clique on Bradford council has forced a 68-year-old retired woman, Jemima Wilson, to go to court to prevent 15 old people's homes, including hers, from being sold off to the private sector, like so many goods and chattels? With Christmas nearly here, that is surely outrageous.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that this matter is not sub judice. I understand that it is the subject of a judicial review.

Mr. Cryer: But if there were a debate, Mr. Speaker, we could get the Government to intervene to stop these homes being sold off. Then there would be no need for a judicial review and the old people would be secure in their homes for Christmas.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman and a number of his hon. Friends like democracy when they win; they do not like it when they lose. I have no intention of commenting on matters that are before the courts.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Does the Leader of the House agree that his response to our request for a debate on the Barlow Clowes affair and to the spirit of early-day motion 40 has been complacent?

[That this House calls for a full and early debate on the Barlow Clowes Affair.]

The responses I have had from my constituents who have suffered at the hands of Barlow Clowes and who have read Sir Godfray Le Quesne's report, show that they have not been led to the conclusion, to which the Leader of the House came, that the report, as well as the statement by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, should appease them or lessen the need for a debate. On the contrary, they have written to me saying unanimously that they were further angered when they realised from the report what was going on. They say that the need for a debate has been increased rather than diminished.

Mr. Wakeham: I think that the hon. Gentleman, who I always hope will make serious contributions, has got it wrong. The report to which he refers was the report of a statement of the facts; it did not come to any conclusions. The Government came to some conclusions based on the report. The matter has been referred to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, and I think that on reflection the hon. Gentleman will agree that that is the best way to proceed.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): There is a widespread feeling in the House that the Bill on the security services and the Bill on reform of section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 should be taken on the Floor of the House. What is the Government's intention?

Mr. Wakeham: The Government's intention is to discuss those matters through the usual channels.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Are we not entitled to a statement next week explaining why, if no decision has been made about the Queen going to Moscow, lobby correspondents were informed by Mr. Bernard Ingham—the same story has appeared in the

[Mr. David Winnick]

Sunday press—that the Queen would not go to Moscow because the Romanovs were killed in 1917? Do we take it that the Prime Minister was telling the truth, or does Mr. Bernard Ingham simply make up policy as he goes along?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman can take it from me that the Prime Minister was telling the truth.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is the Leader of the House aware of the deep concern being expressed by football supporters throughout the country about the Government's proposals for an identity card system? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us why such a controversial piece of legislation is to start its passage in the House of Lords?

It could be argued that their Lordships know very little about football—even less than Members of this House, with the honourable exception of myself, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) and a number of other Opposition Members. Before we are faced with a parliamentary lobby by the Inter-City Firm from West Ham, should we not have a debate here next week—as we have considerable time on our hands—so that at least the House of Lords can get some idea of the feeling across this House about the Government's invidious proposal?

Mr. Wakeham: I have already answered the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) who takes a serious interest in these matters, and I have nothing further to add.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the rate support settlement that was announced recently has caused inordinate problems in the west midlands? Not least is the problem affecting passenger transport, whose grant has been cut by £13 million. That can only lead to chaos in passenger transport, and in west midlands transport generally. I should very much welcome an opportunity for us to debate the matter, possibly with a statement from the Secretary of State for the Environment next week.

Mr. Wakeham: As I have said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will speak in the environment debate on Monday, and the hon. Gentleman could well make his points then.

BILLS PRESENTED

PREVENTION OF TERRORISM (TEMPORARY PROVISIONS)

Mr. Secretary Hurd, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary King, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Tony Newton and Mr. Douglas Hogg, presented a Bill to make provision in place of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 and further provision in relation to powers of search under, and persons convicted of scheduled offences within the meaning of, the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 2.]

ELECTED AUTHORITIES (NORTHERN IRELAND)

Mr. Secretary King, supported by Mr. Secretary Ridley, Mr. Ian Stewart and Mr. Richard Needham, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to the franchise at elections to district councils in Northern Ireland, to make provision in relation to a declaration against terrorism to be made by candidates at such elections and at elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and by persons co-opted as members of district councils, to amend sections 3 and 4 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 5.]

Parliamentary Lobbies

3.9 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance. A large number of students are trying to lobby their Members of Parliament, and twice in the past half-hour police officers outside have quoted to me Sessional Orders that were approved by the House on Tuesday this week.

As many people have strong feelings on this issue and have travelled from many parts of the country wishing to put their views to their Members of Parliament, will you, Mr. Speaker, use your influence as Speaker and through the Serjeant at Arms—and whoever else may be necessary—to try to ensure that representatives of the various constituencies are able to reach the House, and also that hon. Members are able to find their constituents? Hon. Members are being refused permission to cross Westminster bridge to find their constituents, and I do not believe that that is provided for in the Sessional Orders.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday there was a lobby of probation officers. I went to St. Stephen's entrance and informed the police there that there were some people outside who were expecting to see me. I was told to go to the outer railings and to tell the police there, which I did. My constituents were denied access to the building for more than one hour although I had taken the trouble to go to the entrance and inform the police that they were expecting to see me.

It seems that, when there are lobbies, police are often drafted in from other areas who are not familiar with the procedures of the House. There is usually a book in which the names of Members and expected constituents are recorded. That book did not seem obvious when I went to the entrance yesterday, but I took it on trust that my request would be met. It was not. I think that when we take the trouble to make arrangements, they should be honoured. Constituents' access to the House is a time-honoured principle; I hope that you will look into the matter, Mr. Speaker, and make effective arrangements.

Mr. Speaker: On the first point of order, I understand that a large number of students are today seeking to lobby their Members of Parliament. I am sure that the police are doing their best, and I understand that the Grand Committee Room has been booked for them. I shall receive reports about the matter.

On the second point of order, it is always difficult when many members of the public wish to lobby hon. Members. The police do their best. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) was not here in the previous Parliament when this matter arose frequently. It is not considered fair for hon. Members to bring in their constituents personally, because that tends to cause trouble with others in the queue at St. Stephen's entrance.

Mr. Pike: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry to prolong the issue, but you did not respond to my question about whether the Sessional Orders prevent an hon. Member from crossing Westminster bridge to see his or her constituents on the other side.

Mr. Speaker: An hon. Member has access to and from the House if that is a practical proposition. I understand that a large number of people are on Westminster bridge at the moment.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 13 (Arrangement of public business) shall have effect for this Session with the following modifications, namely:

> In paragraph (4) the word "twelve" shall be substituted for the word "ten" in line 43; and in paragraph (7) the word "nine" shall be substituted for the word "ten" in line 64;

(2) Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 27th January, 3rd, 10th, 17th and 24th February, 3rd March, 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th April, 5th May, and 7th July;

(3) Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence over Government business on 16th December, 20th January, 10th and 17th March, 12th and 19th May, 9th, 16th and 23rd June and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on Wednesday 30th November, Wednesday 21st December, Wednesday 22nd February, Wednesday 1st March, Wednesday 26th April, Wednesday 3rd May, Wednesday 17th May, Wednesday 24th May and Wednesday 7th June;

(4) On Monday 19th December, Monday 13th February, Monday 15th May and Monday 12th June, Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence until Seven o'clock and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on Thursday 1st December, Thursday 26th January, Thursday 27th April and Thursday 18th May; and

(5) No Notice of Motion shall be handed in for any of the days on which Private Members' Notices have precedence under this Order in anticipation of the ballot for that day.—*[Mr. Wakeham.]*

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[THIRD DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [22 November.]

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Sir Giles Shaw.]*

Question again proposed.

Social Security and Employment

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State, I should like to make an appeal for brief speeches. There were several lengthy speeches last night which sadly caused a number of hon. Members distress as they were unable to be called. I hope that that will not happen today.

3.12 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Moore): Any Government who are spending, as we will be from next April, nearly £1 billion a week, or £52 billion a year, on social security welcome the opportunity to discuss the subject in the Queen's Speech. That amount of money is a measure of our commitment. It is a measure of the commitment that we make as a Government to the old, the frail and the disadvantaged.

No Government in history have been able to match that pattern of expenditure. These are vast sums, but many people rightly judge that spending alone is not enough to create a viable social security policy. A sense of purpose and direction is equally essential. Indiscriminate largesse may make it easy to bask in a warm glow of self-righteousness, but it is a poor excuse for policy. Equally poor policy is the Socialist pursuit of egalitarian philosophy at the expense of trying to help people in need.

The purpose of this Government when approaching social security policy is, and will remain, to find ways in which to help and protect the weak and vulnerable, while encouraging those who can help themselves. In our pursuit of those aims, we must be realistic. We must take full account of the world of the late 1980s in which we live, not the world dominated by memories of the 1930s or the myths of the 1940s.

Before looking at some of the key areas to see how we can pursue our objectives, I shall stress what we will not be doing. We will not engage in empty rhetoric and bogus promises. In no subject is that easier for an irresponsible Opposition than in social security. They create false hopes and expectations that are never satisfied. As anyone with experience in government knows, commitments must be backed by sound economic performance. In social security there is no point in promising the earth if one can deliver only the International Monetary Fund. Therefore, I make no apology——

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The Secretary of State is on the defensive from the start.

Mr. Moore: The Government have had no need to go cap in hand to the IMF.

I make no apology for stressing that sound finances and a strong economy are the conditions for a successful social security policy. Welfare without wealth is simply not possible. There are many contrasts between our success and Labour's failures. The Labour party failed, not in its desire to help—I acknowledge that—but in its ability to help because of its economic failure when in office.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The Secretary of State is scathing about people going cap in hand to organisations for loans. Can he tell us why he is forcing hundreds of thousands of fellow citizens to go cap in hand to the DSS for loans instead of grants?

Mr. Moore: Beyond the massive sums given in social security, facilities are now provided to enable people to receive help without interest. The hon. Gentleman may wish to be reminded of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman's views on the previous single payments system:

> "The single payments system was a pretty dire and ghastly one which, until it was abolished, attracted massive criticism right across the poverty lobby."

Those are not my words, but those of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook).

I was trying to contrast the Opposition's failure with what is happening now. The income of those on average earnings, with young children, through tax allowances and child benefit, has been higher in real terms throughout our period in office than it was under the previous Labour Government. There was one exception to that, and that was during their last month in office before the 1979 general election.

There is another contrast in the debates on the Christmas bonus. Our Government have made it a statutory payment, which contrasts with the Opposition's inability, because of economic failure, to pay the bonus in 1975 and 1976.

I shall look briefly at the way in which our economic success and clear social security objectives have enabled us to carry out our policies. All of us know that it is nonsense to pretend that all families with children are in a similar position and require equal help from the state. That is why, within the Government's £10 billion overall expenditure on families, I am again this year focusing extra help on 1·6 million families, with 3 million children. I shall not weary the House with all the data, but hon. Members will remember the debate on the uprating statement when I illustrated the large percentage increments accruing to those families. I gave an example of a family with a child under 11 years of age, where the increase was 9·3 per cent.

I was also able to take into account, not only my expenditure programme within the Government, but the changes in earnings and taxation. I know that the House may want to be reminded of the contrast in the real take-home pay of a married man, on average earnings, with two children. Since 1978-79 the take-home pay has increased by 27 per cent. in real terms. That should be compared with the five miserable Socialist years, when the take-home pay of a similar couple increased by only 1 per cent. Although most of the extra help has been given to families receiving income support, a considerable amount has been directed to families receiving family credit. I remind the House of how generous and effective family credit can be.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): They have lost free school meals.

Mr. Moore: I shall come to that in a minute. Labour Front-Bench spokesmen should not snigger, but should concern themselves with the interests of those of their constituents who are in low-paid employment.

A couple with two children aged 11 and 14 years—these will not be palatable facts for Labour Members—receiving gross earnings of £135, at present receive £14·70 under the family credit scheme. In April, under the changes announced in the uprating statement, that will increase to £20·73.

Another illustration from the uprating statement is germane to this discussion. A lone parent, with one child under five years, receiving a gross income as low as £75 a week can at present receive £25 under family credit. That will increase to £30 next spring.

I agree with the comments in the uprating statement that we are not reaching target. Family credit is a new benefit that has been in operation for only six months. The number of applications and successful awards is increasing fast, and a new publicity campaign is in the pipeline. It has been in operation for too short a period to make a proper assessment, other than to recognise the serious nature of the family credit system and its obvious attractions.

I remind the House of another good feature of the first six months of the scheme. Expenditure on family credit —despite the fact that take-up is just under 40 per cent., which is not what we had hoped for at this stage—is already running at £400 million a year, which is double the rate of expenditure on family income supplement.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): If the Secretary of State is laying such stress on family credit, will he take account of the parallel cuts in housing benefit and free school meals to those same families? Has he seen the report of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, which commented that the increase in family credit was in part an illusion? The result of its survey showed that half the families with children were worse off after the cuts in housing benefit, and nearly everybody was worse off when account was taken of the loss of free school meals.

Mr. Moore: I am surprised at how attracted the hon. Gentleman is to so frequently quoting from partial surveys. The partial survey from which he quotes was taken by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux in the first month following the introduction of a completely new social security system. Not only that, but it was based on a selective sample of those who had not been satisfied with the arrangements that had been made at local benefit offices. Such a sample is not worth quoting.

I accept that take-up is not satisfactory, and I hope that all hon. Members will want to improve it. I recognise that the House is not completely in accord with the decision that I took, but the majority of people in this country think that it was right. They believe that it is better to try to help those who are genuinely in need in a substantial way than to give a small amount of help to everyone. The Labour party has reached a peculiar position in modern social security policy. It has been pushed by its egalitarianism into championing the better-off and lambasting the Government for directing extra help to the poor.

Our record on helping disabled people illustrates again our commitment to directing resources to where they are needed. I acknowledge that the last Labour Government increased expenditure on disabled people by 26 per cent. in real terms, but our stronger economy has enabled us to increase it by a massive 90 per cent. in real terms, from £1·8 billion in 1979 to £7·3 billion this year.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): On the question of that massive increase of 90 per cent., can the Secretary of State tell us the increase in the number of disabled people since 1979, by how much their incomes have increased and whether they have shared in the general prosperity?

Mr. Moore: I was going to come to that point. We obviously are looking to the details in the survey by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. Unlike the survey established by the Labour Government, the OPCS survey does not limit the way of identifying disablement, so it gives us greater informaton. It is clear that there has been no change in the numbers, but better knowledge is coming from these surveys. We want first to examine the surveys.

I am delighted, as is the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), at what we have been able to do because of the huge increase. The right hon. Gentleman asked about numbers, and I shall illustrate two critical ones. We have been able to extend the coverage of invalidity benefit from 6,000 people in 1979 to 1,130,000 today. We have been able to increase the coverage of mobility allowance from 95,000 people in 1979 to 530,000 today. That illustrates the extent to which we have sought to enhance benefits for the disabled and to increase coverage.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The Secretary of State is throwing many figures around. I have some serious cases in my constituency of people who have applied for benefit. I have reason to believe that the Department of Social Security is telling the doctors who examine those people —*[Interruption.]* I have not finished yet. The Department is sending doctors into homes to examine those people to make sure that when the report is made they do not get the benefit that they should receive. It is high time that the Secretary of State got on his feet, walked around his constituency and stepped over some of these doorsteps to see how people are suffering under this Administration.

Mr. Moore: I have never doubted the sincerity of the hon. Gentleman, whom I have known for many years, but I doubt his ability to reconcile the facts that I have put before the House with the comments that he has just made. Hon. Members on both sides of the House should welcome the enormous increase in the numbers covered by disability benefits. I started my comments by acknowledging the Labour party's improvements and by sympathising with Labour Members because their economic failure had not enabled them to extend these benefits as much as my Government have done.

I have talked about targeting extra resources to those who need them. I am equally anxious, as are all hon. Members, to ensure that money does not go to those who do not need it. There is considerable evidence that a

[Mr. Moore]

minority—I stress "a minority"—who claim unemployment benefit do not make strenuous efforts to find work. The 1988 London Labour market report by the Department of Employment showed that more than 25 per cent. had not looked for work in a week, and that half had not bothered to look for work in the previous month. The 1987 labour force survey showed that as many as 730,000 people were not actively seeking work, despite the more than 700,000 unfilled vacancies in a typical month, many of which do not need specific training.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Moore: I have given way frequently, and I have many other points to make.

Clearly, that is an abuse of the system. It is grossly unfair to those in work who are paying contributions to provide the benefit and to those who are genuine and energetic, as most are, in their search for work.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin) *rose*——

Mr. Moore: As the hon. Gentleman will understand, there will be other opportunities to speak.

I shall shortly bring before the House a social security Bill that will include provision to ensure that those claiming unemployment benefit take active steps to find work. I am sure that that measure will be widely welcomed.

I want to consider the position of millions of our citizens who are pensioners. Let me make clear some things that need to be stated only because of the Opposition's scaremongering tactics. We will not means-test the basic state pension. We will continue to protect it against erosion from inflation. We will safeguard the entitlement to a state pension which a lifetime of contributions creates. That is, and always has been, the position. To imply anything else is cruelly to deceive and frighten millions of pensioners.

Mr. Cryer: Was the Chancellor of the Exchequer misunderstood by all the reporters?

Mr. Moore: The unelectability of the Labour party is illustrated by the idiotic remarks from below the Gangway. We need no lectures from the Opposition about our record on pensions. It is an extremely unwise tactic for them to adopt because they can be nailed by the facts. I intend to ensure that the facts of our relative records are made clear. *[Interruption.]* The facts are clearly unpalatable to the Opposition.

First, under the Labour Government, pensioners' total income—*[Interruption.]* I am not surprised to see the shadow Leader of the House leaving the Chamber. Under the Labour Government, pensioners' total income rose by a pathetic 0·6 per cent. per year—a total of 3 per cent. in the whole of Labour's period of office. We have equalled that total on average every year since we have been in office. Secondly, the average total income of pensioners has risen by 23 per cent. since 1979—twice as fast as for the population as a whole.

Mr. Dobson: I am back now.

Mr. Moore: I am always happy to welcome the hon. Gentleman. The truth may even help his digestion. *[Interruption.]* A course in wit from the shadow Leader of the House—what a perversion of the truth!

Thirdly, the average gross income of a pensioner—*[Interruption.]* There is plenty of time to bring out the unpalatable facts about the appalling record of this miserable Opposition when in government. The average gross income of a pensioner as a percentage of adult manual earnings was 55 per cent. in 1974. By 1979, it had declined to 53 per cent. By 1986, it had come back up, not just to 55 per cent., but to 60 per cent. That is quite a contrast.

Savings, too, are vital to the elderly as the reward for thrift. That is why elderly people are so vulnerable to inflation. They will never forget the Parliament under which inflation averaged 15 per cent. a year for five years so that income from savings fell by 3 per cent. per year. That is to be compared with an increase of 7 per cent. per year in the past nine years—a staggering 64 per cent. in all.

Looking at the pensioners of our country, I have great difficulty recognising the poverty-stricken stereotype that Labour Members love to portray, because it is simply not borne out by the facts. In 1979, 38 per cent. of pensioners were in the bottom fifth of national income distribution. Happily, the proportion has now fallen to 24 per cent. Everyone should welcome that crucial and major change in such a relatively short period.

We have always recognised that some pensioners do not fit the picture of rising prosperity that has transformed the lives of so many others. The House will be aware of the group to which I refer. They are the older pensioners—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) will be patient, however difficult that may be for a Socialist, he will hear the facts. I refer to the older pensioners and the disabled who have little or no other income than their basic state pension. Many will have had their working lives disrupted by war and their savings battered by the rampant inflation of the 1970s. The present income support scheme already provides extra help for pensioners through the pensioner and higher pensioner premiums, currently worth £10·65 and £13·05 per week for single pensioners and larger sums for couples.

However, for some time we have been considering additional ways of helping that group of pensioners. I am delighted to tell the House that, as a result of that work, we have decided on the best way to channel significant extra resources to that group. Without the success of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and a successful economy, I should not be able to make this statement today.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents are down here today, trying to lobby hon. Members. They are not being allowed to come anywhere near the House, and when I went out to try to meet some of them I was informed by a young policeman, "Get over there on the right hand side." *[Interruption.]* Unlike many Conservative Members, I have been here for a long time. I have always known that the constituents of all hon. Members have the right to come to the House, go through Westminster Hall perhaps, and on to the Central Lobby to lobby their Member of Parliament. That is not being allowed to happen at the moment and people are not getting near the House of Commons. This is one further attack on the liberties of our people, and it must stop. Our constituents have a right to come here.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): *On a point of order,* Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Was the hon. Gentleman here before?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, I was. I have just been out there. It has been made clear to us that several thousand students —and students are being hammered by the Government by the change in the student grant system and its replacement by loans—will not get into this building. Even those with a letter from a Member of Parliament are not being allowed into the building. If they had come from the City of London, they would no doubt have been allowed in at the drop of a hat.

I want you, Mr. Speaker, to investigate whether instructions have been given by the Tory Government and their lackeys here today because they do not want to meet students who would give them an earhole bashing about the introduction of student loans. Were instructions sent out to stop those students?

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am listening to a point of order, I do not expect another to be raised in the middle of it.

Mr. Skinner: Some students are saying loud and clear that Tory Members are refusing to go out and meet them, so one can draw the conclusion that they are so embarrassed by the Government's proposals that they are stopping students coming into this building.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Surely it would be better to get on with this debate. I shall take the point of order from the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), because he gave me notice in the Chair.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I had intended to raise this point of order when the Secretary of State for Social Security had sat down, but in view of the points of order that have been raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), I want to ask you to order an investigation.

Shortly before 3.30 pm I saw, from my office on the fourth floor of the Norman Shaw North building, a range of mounted policemen opposite an approximately equal number of students on the road. The mounted policemen charged those students on two occasions and, from my position, it appeared that the amount of force that was being used was out of proportion to whatever crime had theoretically been committed. I know that processions are not permitted in the precincts of the House, or near it, while the House is sitting. However, I am not convinced that the action taken on this occasion was concomitant with the rights of people to come to the House. I ask you to carry out an investigation.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. The traffic jams around the Palace of Westminster stretch for at least 3 miles. I know that because it has taken me an hour and a half to come from south London. Students are blocking Westminster bridge at the moment by sitting on it. They are obstructing the passage of hon. Members to the House and preventing hon. Members from getting here so that we may speak to them. May I ask you to have a word with the Commissioner of the Metropolitan police when the demonstration is over, to discover the facts about the obstruction caused to hon. Members?

Mr. Speaker: I am well aware that a large number of students are involved: I understand that there are several thousand. Equally I am aware that some of them have staged a sit-down and that that is causing a degree of confusion. I am not responsible for what goes on in the streets, other than the streets in the vicinity of the Palace of Westminster, but the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) has raised an important point. I shall certainly look into it, and I shall be receiving reports.

Mr. Moore: I shall go back a fraction, because what I have to say has considerable relevance to a large number of pensioners. As I said, for some time we have been looking for additional ways of helping a specific group of pensioners. I am delighted to tell the House that, as a result of that work, we have been able to decide on the best way to channel significant extra resources to this group.

I am pleased to be able to tell the House that, subject to the necessary consultative procedures, we intend to introduce into the income support scheme a new and enhanced structure of pensioner premiums with effect from October next year. The new pattern of premiums will result in extra help, carefully focused on three groups—pensioners over 75 on income support, disabled pensioners over 60 on income support, and poorer pensioners in those groups whose income is at present just above the qualifying level for income support and who will get extra help through housing benefit.

Let me take each of the groups in turn. Before doing that, however, let me make a general point, which may be helpful. I recognise the complexity of what I am about to announce. There will, of course, be time to discuss these matters further when the necessary regulations are brought before the House.

First, to help the over-75s, I propose to introduce a completely new premium, for those aged between 75 and 79. It will be worth an extra £2·50 for single pensioners and an extra £3·50 for a couple. That will, of course, be above the rates of pensioner premium announced for next April. The measure will raise the income support premium available to those aged between 75 and 79 to £13·70 a week for single people, and £20·55 for couples. In addition, there will be an improved premium for the over-80s. This will enhance the existing higher pensioner premium, which currently goes to some 550,000 pensioners. The over-80s premium will also be increased by £2·50 a week for a single person and by £3·50 for a pensioner couple. That means that a single pensioner over the age of 80 on income support will receive a premium of £16·20, rising to £23 for a married couple.

Secondly, I propose to enhance the disabled pensioner premium for those over 60 by £2·50 for single people and £3·50 for couples. The House will know that at the moment all disabled pensioners over 60 receive the higher pensioner premium. I propose that they should continue to receive the highest rate of premium at the same level as the over-80s.

[Mr. Moore]

I estimate that the first two changes will result in around 940,000 pensioners on income support receiving increases of £2·50 or £3·50 a week. What is more, those increases will be on top of the increases in income support that I recently announced, with effect from next April. Taken together, all the changes will give most of these pensioners an increase of around 10 per cent. in their benefit, and in some cases even more.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): My right hon. Friend is giving good news for pensioners. Can he confirm that these are additional resources over and above what has been made known so far?

Mr. Moore: I am coming to that point, but I confirm that these are additional resources above and beyond all that I have announced.

These proposals benefit not only the poorest pensioners, but those whose incomes currently place them just over the qualifying level for income support by raising the income level at which pensioners can obtain help for housing costs. As a result of the new structure of premiums, a further 1,030,000 poorer pensioners will receive additional help through housing benefit. In all, more than 2·5 million pensioners and their spouses will receive significant increases, at a total additional cost of some £100 million in 1989-90 and £200 million for a full year. That will be met from the reserve within existing planning totals. It is all new money for pensioners.

These changes are in addition to those already announced in my uprating statement, and work on the uprating statement is already well in hand. I propose, subject to consultation with local authorities and to the passage of the necessary regulations, to introduce these changes in October 1989. This will enable my benefit officers and local authorities to give pensioners this extra help before the onset of next winter. These elderly and disabled pensioners can look forward to two upratings next year—one in the spring and the other in the autumn.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this dramatic announcement of additional assistance for pensioners will be widely welcomed? Allowing for the rate of inflation, which is under half the average when the Labour party was in office, it means that pensioners, whether receiving universal benefit or targeted benefit, have never been better off than now.

Mr. Moore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has a great interest in this subject.

For most of those involved the increase will be automatic. They will not need to make any new claim or fill in any form. Some of my hon. Friends will be concerned about whether pensioners will claim the benefits to which they are entitled, so I propose to mount a publicity campaign to tell pensioners about the new arrangements that will come in next October. As part of that campaign we shall be writing to all pensioners over 75 whose address we hold, to explain the changes.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): Is my right hon. Friend aware that for some time I have been concerned about those immediately above income support level? Some of us represent constituencies where there are large numbers of such people. Can he clarify the details of the income support qualifications for those individuals, or will they be provided in papers at some later date? This is excellent news.

Mr. Moore: I am aware of the need of hon. Members for additional details, and hon. Members on both sides will be pleased with the assistance that I shall seek to give them. Apart from this speech, details will be available immediately in the Vote Office and, with permission, I shall arrange for details to be printed in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Can the Secretary of State assure the House that the additional moneys, welcome though they are, will not be at the expense of any transitional payment that currently applies? If transitional payments are reduced, the Government's generosity will be even more in question.

Mr. Moore: I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that these payments will not affect transitional payments.

Sir Barney Hayhoe (Brentford and Isleworth): As my right hon. Friend knows, I have commented on these matters recently. Today's announcement will be warmly welcomed by all who are concerned with these matters. Can he give some indication of the total annual cost of these substantial improvements?

Mr. Moore: I believe that I said it was nearly £200 million.

The package of measures that I have just announced will bring extra help to more than 2·5 million of our least well-off pensioners. It will do so by directing almost £200 million to those who genuinely need it. I am confident that it will be warmly welcomed by the House and by the British people. But the new measures must be seen against the background of the steady increases in the living standards of pensioners as a whole. The new measures will tackle something which I thought was a tenet of the Labour party: they will give most help to those who need it most. That is one of our key objectives for social security, and we intend to see it through.

Following are the details—

Extra help for pensioners—the Government's proposals

It is proposed that income support paid to pensioners will be restructured from October 1989. There will be new premiums for pensioners 75 and over, 80 and over and disabled pensioners. These will provide an extra £2·50 a week for single pensioners and an extra £3·50 a week for couples. This will be over and above the increases already announced for the April uprating. The same increase will apply to the housing benefit rates so that pensioners slightly above income support levels will also benefit through extra help with rent and rates or community charge.

	New structure of income support premiums from October 1989		*Announced rates from April 1989*	
	Single £	*Couple*[1] £	*Single* £	*Couple*[1] £
60-74 (not disabled)	11·20	17·05	11·20	17·05
75-79	13·70	20·55		
80 plus	16·20	23·00	13·70	19·50
Disabled 60 and over	16·20	23·00	13·70	19·50

[1] The couples rate applies if either member is over 75 or 80, or is disabled.

Resulting Income Support Levels for Pensioners

£ per week

	Current	*April 1989*	*October 1989*
Age 60-74			
Single	44·05	46·10	46·10
Couple	67·70	71·85	71·85
Age 75-79			
Single	44·05	46·10	48·60
Couple	67·70	71·85	75·35
Age 80 plus or Disabled			
Single	46·45	48·60	51·10
Couple	70·05	74·30	77·80

Number who benefit in a full year

2 million pensioners claimants gain in a full year:

- 940,000 on income support (including 140,000 disabled)
- A further 1,030,000 on housing benefit (including 200,000 disabled)

Including husbands and wives, 2·6 million pensioners will be better off.

Cost

£95 million in 1989-90
£195 million in 1990-91

3.50 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have just returned from witnessing the peaceful demonstration by students outside the House. The House should have an urgent statement from the Home Secretary about the unnecessary violence that has been used against those students and the unnecessary brutality to women students, with four or five policemen needed to drag one woman across the road. When officials of the National Union of Students were trying to get the crowd to move back, the police horses were moved in without warning. Two Tory voters came up to me, introduced themselves, and said that they had seen such events in Fascist countries but had not believed that they could happen in a country such as Britain. The Home Secretary should be asked to come to the House to make a statement on the tactics that were chosen for this demonstration. It is outrageous.

Mr. Speaker: I do not know whether the hon. Lady was here a moment ago when another hon. Member raised that point with me, in relation to events outside Norman Shaw, North. I have already said that I shall send for a report on the matter.

3.51 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): The Secretary of State made two important announcements. The first was that we will have a Bill on social security that will be fashioned further to restrict entitlement to unemployment benefit and social security for those who are unemployed by tackling the availability for work test. I note the Secretary of State's assent that that is his intention. That Bill will build on a precedent that occurred in the previous Session, when a similar Bill was devised to remove benefit from another group of unemployed claimants—16 and 17-year-olds—all of whom have lost benefit since the beginning of the summer recess.

Those young people lost benefit because of a pledge that was given to the House when we debated the Bill, that there would be a YTS place for every 16 and 17-year-old who lost benefit. On Second Reading, in Committee and on Report we warned the Secretary of State that that guarantee would not be met. I regret to inform the House that we were correct. The Government have admitted that we were correct by conceding that on 9 November more than 13,000 16 and 17-year-olds who were looking for YTS places had not been provided with them.

There is a cruel dimension to those figures in relation to the north-south divide. Most of the teenagers who are looking for places but cannot find them live in constituencies represented by Labour Members in the north-west, the north-east, central Scotland and south Wales—areas of high unemployment. Teenagers must suffer further discrimination because they come from areas of social deprivation.

Half the 13,000—6,600—are in Scotland. One of them, a teenage girl in Edinburgh known to me, has just lost her bridging allowance, which ran for eight weeks from the end of her entitlement to benefit on 12 September. In those eight weeks she turned up and sought interviews for eight YTS places, and on each occasion found that they had been filled. Despite those desperate and serious attempts to find a place, 10 days ago she lost all entitlement to any income support and for the past 10 days has had no cash for food or fuel—that is in one of the coldest periods that we have had this year—and she is now left completely destitute. That girl had seriously looked for work, but the Government could not provide her either with work or with a traineeship. Against that background, I can promise the Secretary of State that if he brings forward a Bill designed to inflict that same humiliation and hardship on larger numbers, the Opposition will resist it entirely.

The Secretary of State also made another major statement in relation to those at the other end of the age spectrum—pensioners. We are, of course, aware of the genesis of his statement. Curiously, the figures and the new measures that he announced today were omitted from the uprating statement only three weeks ago. It is rather surprising that, given this extra £200 million from the back pocket and all this additional largesse to pensioners, the Secretary of State could not find a couple of minutes in the uprating statement to include any reference to it.

We know that the origins of today's statement do not rest with the uprating exercise in the Department. The origins of today's statement can be traced to the lucubrations of the Chancellor before the Sunday lobby a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Moore: The hon. Gentleman and I have known each other for some time. He will expect me to say this carefully. I have been working on a package of measures for poorer pensioners for a considerable time. I repeat that. Knowing the right hon. Gentleman as well as I do, I do not imagine that he would like to continue ignoring that fact.

Mr. Cook: I assure the Secretary of State that I would not deny what he says. I am sure that he has been working on a package. I am sure that it featured in his discussions with the Chief Secretary. What was interesting was that that did not feature in his uprating statement to the House, from which we can only conclude that at the time that he was having his discussions with the Chief Secretary he was unable to persuade him quite so effectively as the Chancellor was able to persuade him on the Sunday morning when he woke up and read the Sunday papers.

[Mr. Cook]

The Chancellor's observations are the backdrop to the statement that we have just heard because what the Chancellor spelt out was that the Government regard poverty among pensioners as the problem of a minority.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): A small minority.

Mr. Cook: A tiny minority. With characteristic fairness, my right hon. Friend does not go quite the whole way. The Chancellor described it as a tiny minority. He was perhaps unwise enough to make that observation immediately before the weather turned colder, when large numbers of pensioners will be driven to distraction trying to make ends meet in order to pay their heating bills, many of whom will fail. As a country, we have a death rate that increases by 20 per cent. in the winter months compared with the rest of the year. Other countries with much colder climates, such as Sweden, nevertheless manage to do much better and see an increase in their death rate of only 6 per cent. in the winter.

The explanation is simple. It is hard cash. Pensioners in Britain spend less on heating than other groups in Britain. Those in work spend more on heating. Pensioners spend less on heating not because they need it less—they need it more—but because they can afford it less.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) understands that point. I would, in parenthesies, congratulate the Secretary of State. One effect of the recent ministerial changes is that he has the consolation that he no longer has ministerial responsibility for the hon. Lady. But the hon. Lady diverted us the other week by inviting pensioners to go to bed in a woolly nightcap because—on this matter the hon. Lady speaks with authority—one can lose a lot of heat through one's head. While her advice may be entertaining to us, to pensioners it is deeply insulting. It suggests that the rest of us can go to warm, well-heated bedrooms, but it is good enough for them to go to bed with tea cosies on their heads.

Who are the tiny minority who have a problem making ends meet and paying their heating bills? The week after the Chancellor's briefing, the Prime Minister put her own gloss on that minority, which I notice was picked up in the Secretary of State's targeting of his benefit. The Prime Minister said that only 18 per cent. of pensioners are on income support, from which I presume we are to conclude that they are the tiny minority who have difficulty making ends meet. They are overwhelmingly the group targeted in the statement that we have just heard. The Prime Minister was wise to say "only" 18 per cent., because we know that 27 per cent. of pensioners are eligible for income support.

The fact that 1 million pensioners would rather live below the breadline than submit to a means test is one reason why we in the Labour party do not accept that it is possible to end poverty in old age by a means-tested benefit. There will always be many pensioners who will put their pride before their purses.

One could argue that 20 per cent. is a minority, although it is not tiny. However, another 30 per cent. are only 40 per cent. or less in income terms above the breadline of income support. I presume that we are to conclude that they have no difficulty making ends meet. That must be the logic of the Chancellor's and the Prime Minister's observations. If we add in that 30 per cent. to the 27 per cent., we are not talking about a minority, far less a tiny minority—it is a clear majority. So presumably that 30 per cent. has no difficulty in making ends meet.

What is the income of those people? It is up to £20 to £30 higher than the income support levels. That figure exaggerates the extent to which they are better off than those on the breadline. That group of pensioners—the 3 million who, as the Secretary of State observed, are not among the worst off—are the true victims of the means test. They are always on the wrong side of the means test. They were the victims of the cuts in housing benefit. They are the people who lost 85p for every £1 by which they were above that income support level. I must tell the House, in case hon. Members have failed to notice, that the entire relaxation and relief held out to that group by the announcement that we have just heard is that those people are now entitled to an increase in their housing benefit by a grand total of £1·95 a week, compared with the cuts of £12, £15 and £20 a week that my hon. Friends and I have seen among our constituents.

Those people were also the victims of the increases in health charges. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who drew my attention to a constituent of his who visited him. She is a widow, with an income of £69 a week, who has just had to pay £8·75 for her most recent visit to the dentist. Those people are also the victims of new charges in the Health Service. Those 3 million will have to pay £10 the next time they go to the optometrist to have their eyes tested.

I notice that the Chief Secretary, when he addressed the Select Committee yesterday, described means testing as "a benevolent principle". The right hon. Gentleman should try to express that benevolent principle to the 3 million people who find constantly that the means test deprives them of help, although they are precisely the people who have taken the Government at their word. They have been prudent and provided for their old age but, as a result of that prudence and provision, they are no better off.

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): The House knows that I am not the greatest advocate of selectivity in some of those benefits, but is the hon. Gentleman really saying that the Labour party would abolish all forms of supplementary pension?

Mr. Cook: Of course the Labour party is not saying any such thing, nor was there anything in my remarks to suggest that. There always have been, and there always will be, means-tested benefits in any welfare system. What we object to is the way in which the Government are consistently failing to use universal benefits to provide a decent floor on which to top up those means-tested benefits. One can see the way in which the Government have failed to do that by looking at what has happened to the state pension.

The Secretary of State had some fun with one of my hon. Friends, accusing him of using selective statistics. Nothing that the Opposition have done can compare with the selectivity of the statistics that the Secretary of State provided on pensioners' income. He is responsible for the state pension. Between 1974 and 1979, the real value of the state pension increased by 20 per cent. In the nine years of this Government's period of office, it has increased by merely 2 per cent.

The reason why it has shown such a small increase over the past nine years is that one of the very first acts of this Government was to smash the link between the pension and the rise in earnings. If that link had been maintained, single pensioners would now be £11 a week better off and married pensioners would be £18 a week better off. Compare and contrast that with the £2·50 that has just been announced for special categories of old-age pensioners. Compare also the £200 million that the Secretary of State has just announced with the £5,000 million that the Government saved by smashing the link with earnings. The Government have taken £5,000 million away and now invite us to thank them for giving back £200 million.

Mr. David Shaw: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that it would be Labour party policy at the next election to restore the link, or, as happened in 1976, will the link be restored only when it can be done in such a way that eight months' inflation can be taken out of the calculation?

Mr. Cook: The Government have uprated the pension in precisely the same way as the Labour Government did when they introduced the link in 1977. The hon. Gentleman's question was fair. It is not something that I or any of my hon. Friends have tried to conceal. It appears that we have failied, but we have tried to get it across to every pensioner in the land that we would restore the link with earnings. That will be one of our major planks at the next election, and it is a plank with which we shall beat the Secretary of State about both ears.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Cook: I should like to make progress with my speech, so I shall not give way.

One of the reasons why we believe that it is not possible to end poverty in old age by means testing alone is that, inevitably with such means testing comes a stigma. Universal benefits go to everybody as citizens, and they can be worn as a badge of citizenship. Means-tested benefits go only to the poor, so they are a label of poverty.

Sometimes the Department of Social Security appears to go out of its way to rub in and stigmatise that poverty. I have a copy of form AG1, which pensioners and others who wish help with prescriptions on grounds of low income have to complete. It runs to 15 pages and has 18 separate parts. The most interesting feature about the document is that the income test for free prescriptions is the same as that for assistance to visit a relative in prison. The Department of Social Security, presumably to consolidate prices and the cost of the document, has provided a common form for applications for help with free prescriptions or with travel to visit a relative in prison.

If one wishes to apply for help, one of the first things that one finds on page 1 is the advice:

> "Claim now if you think you or your partner will need things like NHS prescriptions . . . or are going to visit someone in prison."

Confronted with that, thousands of pensioners in Britain will close up the form then and there and refuse to apply rather than submit to such a stigmatised test. That is why this is so important. If we are to end the poverty of those in old age, while allowing them to retain their dignity, it is vital, in addition to looking at means-tested benefits, to provide a decent universal flat-rate state pension.

We approach the Government's commitment to means-tested benefits with some jaundice because we have had an opportunity over the past year to observe what happens to means-tested benefits under this Administration. We notice that they have a tendency to become even meaner. This debate comes at the start of a new parliamentary year, but halfway through the social security year. It is a convenient point at which to take stock of the changes that we have seen—particularly those in April. This debate is doubly convenient because the reply will be given by the architect of those changes.

The then Secretary of State for Social Services, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Fowler), will recall his constant promise that his reform of the social security system was the biggest for 40 years and that it had to stand the test of the next 40 years. Over the past couple of months I have often wondered what thoughts are passing through the right hon. Gentleman's mind as he notes the observations of his right hon. and hon. Friends, who appear to consider that his reforms have not stood the test of the first year.

The Chancellor, in expansive form, suggests that the social security system needs major restructuring—so major that it will require a programme of re-education of Government Back Benchers. The Secretary of State for Social Security and his hon. Friend the Minister told the House that he did not make any secret of his belief that child benefit is not an effective way of helping the poor. That is perfectly true. I accept that the right hon. Gentleman has never made any secret of his distaste for child benefit. I am happy to assure him that I for one never believed the stories that he was fighting hard to uprate child benefit.

The difficulty is that the Secretary of State never shared his little secret before polling day. The author of the Conservative manifesto's comment on child benefit was not the Secretary of State for Social Security but his right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield. His manifesto commitment was:

> "Child benefit will continue to be paid as now, and direct to the mother."

The comma is important. We have it on the Chancellor of the Exchequer's authority that he is not able to go back on the manifesto because of the comma. When asked who was responsible for inserting the comma, the Chancellor replied:

> "I don't know—not me."

Today, we have the author of the comma. The Secretary of State for Employment must be rueful that his most enduring legacy to his successor is a comma, without which his colleagues would not wait another 40 hours, never mind 40 years, before attacking the structure of child benefit.

The unfortunate feature of all this is that child benefit is the one thing that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield got right. In his White Paper before the reforms, he presented the view:

> "Child benefit is . . . simple, straightforward, well understood and preferred as it is. The case for changing it has not been made out."

The question that I ask at this early point, so that the right hon. Gentleman may have an opportunity to reflect on it before replying, is whether he stands by that quotation; or has he, too, been the subject of a re-education programme and does he now accept the case made by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security that child benefit should be frozen until death?

I turn from the assurance of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield to that of his successor, which has proved

[Mr. Cook]

to be equally flexible. I remind the Secretary of State for Social Security that when the changes were debated in April, he promised the House that 88 per cent. of claimants would be no worse off. Two weeks ago, the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux survey showed that four out of five claimants seeking help had lost money. The NACAB reported also that the elderly fared significantly worse.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Surely it is not beyond the hon. Gentleman's logic or understanding that a person going to a citizens' advice bureau for guidance on social security benefits will probably be complaining about a reduction. Therefore, to find that 20 per cent. of such people are better off is a good rather than a bad thought.

Mr. Kinnock: But it is only a tiny majority!

Mr. Cook: I am glad that I let the hon. Gentleman intervene. He made precisely the point that I anticipated he would. If he bothers to refer to the NACAB survey—and it is obvious from his intervention and from the Secretary of State's response that neither of them has—he will find that it also anticipates his comment:

> "It is an over-simplification to say that it is the casualties of the system who are seen by bureaux are unrepresentative. The numbers involved, the nature of the enquiries, the similarities with other research findings and the nature of the Citizens' Advice Bureaux Service—a generalist information, advice and advocacy service—all suggest that the circumstances identified will occur with sufficient frequency . . . to warrant the Government giving them serious attention."

I concede that such an observation may not be spot on and that it may not be the case that 80 per cent. of claimants are worse off; nevertheless, Ministers now know the figures. They promised the House that they would monitor the effects of the changes. Let them now come forward with the results of that monitoring. Let them say whether their figures are nearer the Government's claim that 88 per cent. of claimants are no worse off or nearer the NACAB claim that 20 per cent. are no worse off but that everybody else is worse off. Let us have the results of the Government's monitoring.

I do not accept the Government's suggestion that we should ignore the NACAB report because, as the Minister expressed it, it is old news. It is a snapshot of what occurred in April and May. I am puzzled as to why the Secretary of State should think that the situation has improved since then. On the contrary, for many individuals it has grown worse. There are, for example, all the claimants who lost transitional protection.

I refer to the case of Mr. and Mrs. Summers of Warley. They are both in their fifties, they are in receipt of supplementary benefit and they are ill. They receive extra allowances for diet, heating, laundry and other additions on account of their illness. They made the mistake of marrying. It is instructive to see what has happened to them, under the party of the family, because they did so. Their marriage triggered a fresh assessment of their social security claims. As a result, they lost their entitlement to transitional protection, and with that all their extra allowances for heating, diet and laundry to which they were previously entitled. In a letter to me, Mr. Summers points out that, as a result of the introduction of the social fund, he had to borrow money to buy furniture when he married. The couple are now in debt. He writes:

> "We have been forced to go into debt and are now in a position where we can't make the repayments. We are in a terrible state and in deep trouble. We feel suicidal."

Mr. and Mrs. Summers—who are now in a terrible state, in deep trouble and feeling suicidal—idiotically and perversely figure among the 88 per cent. whom the Government claim are no worse off. Patently they are worse off. Patently, any candid monitoring of the system is bound to admit that the Government's figure was wrong and that since April the situation has, far from improving, deteriorated.

There is one other area to which I shall refer before concluding, because it is one that we cannot ignore in any review of the year behind and the year ahead. I refer to those who last April were in receipt of housing benefit and the cuts that they have experienced. So great is their hardship and so severe their effects—which the Government failed to anticipate and about which they failed sufficiently to educate their Back Benchers in advance—that the Government were compelled to introduce an emergency scheme on transitional protection. It is highly relevant to all the fashionable chatter about targeting because transitional protection was targeted on only 350,000 of the worst cases. That is against the background of over 5 million people who lost housing benefit—and 350,000 out of 5 million is pinpoint targeting indeed.

It is constructive to note how the Government have succeeded with this precisely targeted benefit. The answer is, as so often, that they are missing most of the targets. Six months after the scheme was introduced, only 125,000 people are in receipt of transitional protection—one third of the original estimate. Two thirds of the original estimate are being missed out and are losing their transitional protection.

I make another prediction. During the next parliamentary Session, that figure of 125,000 will go down sharply. It will go down next April because the Government have announced what they are pleased to call an erosion factor. Next April there will be an erosion factor of £2, and it will be applied to everybody who is on transitional protection for housing benefit. The average amount that is being paid out in transitional protection is only £4. In other words, the average amount that is being received in transitional protection will be halved during the year and a large proportion of the 125,000 will be removed from protection altogether.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): As a result of the housing benefit changes, a single parent with dependent children has lost £16 a week. She applied for transitional protection and was granted the grand total of 98p per week. That left her £15·98 worse off per week as a result of the housing benefit changes. How will she be affected by what happens next April—by the erosion factor of £2 that my hon. Friend mentioned? Where is her protection?

Mr. Cook: I am very sorry to say that I can cap my hon. Friend's tale. I share with the House the case of a widow, Mrs. Jean Turner of Skelmersdale. Her weekly income comes entirely from her widowed mother's allowance and child benefit, giving her a weekly income of £76. last April her housing costs increased by £7 a week. At the same time she lost the entitlement to free school meals, leaving her with additional expenditure of £7 a week. She is £14 worse off, although her weekly income is only £76.

Three weeks ago, Mrs. Turner at last received from the transitional protection unit notification of her entitlement to transitional protection. She has been awarded transitional protection amounting to 1p a week. That is the entire amount that she has been offered in transitional help so that she may adjust to a budget that has collapsed by £14 a week. She is also, in real terms, £100 a year worse off because of the freezing of child benefit. Furthermore, she does not benefit from the increase in family credit because, as a widowed mother looking after two young children and not employed, she is not eligible for family credit. That is another reason why we do not believe that this Government's targeting will relieve poverty.

That brings me to the final absurdity of all. We have a Government who are determined to means-test welfare benefits but who are insisting—in Scotland this Session and in England during the next Session—on introducing a new, flat-rate universal tax: the community charge. That provides us with a sharp contrast between this Government's attitude to benefit and their policy on taxes.

The Government pursue targeting when it comes to taxes, but they stand targeting on its head. One third of the money that was given away in the Budget in tax cuts went to the top one hundredth of the population. That is very precise targeting, but it is the exact reverse of targeting to help those who are most in need. It is pure cant to be told by Conservative Members that they are worried about universal benefits because they go to the better-off. The Government have poured fountains of cash into the laps of the better-off, much of it siphoned out of the pockets and the purses of the most needy and vulnerable people.

I end with an illustration of the reality of life for one of the Secretary of State's targets. A letter was sent to me by a Manchester charity. It enclosed a letter from the manager of a local DHSS office which is seeking the charity's help to assist a claimant. The claimant is single and was in receipt of income support of £26 a week. After paying his rent and rates, his fuel charges and his direct compulsory contributions to fuel arrears, he was left with £8·66 a week for food and other living expenses. That man is sick with chronic psoriasis. He has reached a crisis in his life, because his cooker has been condemned as dangerous by the local gas supplier. In order to get a new cooker to heat his food, he applied to the DHSS for a loan. He was refused a loan on the basis, advanced by the manager, that he did not think that the man could manage the repayments out of his £8·66 a week. To be fair to the manager—and to his credit—he then sent a begging letter to charities in Manchester to find out whether any of them could help this sick, unemployed man to obtain a cooker so that he could eat hot food this winter. His case is the true face of means testing under the Secretary of State.

In the year ahead, we shall lose no opportunity of reminding the Government of the true face of means testing and of contrasting it with their open-handed generosity to the rich.

Mr. Heffer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for again detaining the House, but following my last intervention I left the House to try to find my Liverpool constituents. I understood that they were coming down to London in three buses. I was unable to find them, so I walked across Westminster bridge. The road was blocked off. As I was walking over it, mounted police came up behind me, passed me in serried ranks and then opened up and charged those young students.

I do not know where we are going to; I thought that our people had the right to come here and talk to us. I do not know whether I would have agreed with all that they said, but that is not the point. They have not been allowed to come here. In the old days, we allowed our constituents to come into Parliament a few at a time—probably in even bigger numbers than on this occasion. I am absolutely horrified by what I have seen this afternoon. I do not believe in the use of violence against young students, even if some of them may have been irrational. It is very bad when this sort of thing is allowed to happen.

The rights of the House of Commons are involved; so are our constituents' rights. They have the right to come here at any time to see us. That right is being stopped, so we are now involved.

I understand that you are to look into the matter, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you will also look into the policing that has been used today.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If people were trying to lobby Members of Parliament, some of whom would have been my constituents, and were met with brutality by the police—allegations have been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), who witnessed what has happened today—is not that a crucial point for the House of Commons to consider? We have always said that constituents have a right to come to this place. The Home Secretary—not tomorrow, not on Monday, but today—should be requested to make a statement to the House. If our constituents are prevented from coming here and are faced with brutality from the police, even this Government have a responsibility to report to the House. The Home Secretary should make a statement today, and as quickly as possible.

Mr. Speaker: I have looked into those matters which are within my direct responsibility and I am satisfied that all is in order in the immediate precincts of the House. I am not responsible, as the Speaker, for what takes place either on Westminster bridge or on Lambeth bridge. That is a matter for the Home Secretary. If questions about that matter are in the minds of hon. Members, they should direct them to him.

Mr. Winnick: We want a statement now.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has made that point, and I am sure that what he said was heard by those sitting on the Treasury Bench.

Mr. Winnick: Where is the Leader of the House?

Mr. Dobson: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. We recognise that the police have a dilemma. We have passed Sessional Orders intended to make it possible for hon. Members to come and go without let or hindrance, and also intended to ensure that our constituents can reach us without let or hindrance. Having passed those Orders, we must bear some responsibility when the police attempt to carry them out by obstructing passage across the bridges.

This may not be directly within your purview, Mr. Speaker, but I believe that it would be proper for the Home Secretary or one of his Ministers to come to the House and tell us what is going on. Over the past few years it has become increasingly clear that the police see their function as not to facilitate the passage of those who wish

[Mr. Dobson]

to lobby us but to place more and more obstructions in their way. Although a number of Conservative Members laughed when some of my hon. Friends reported what was happening, I feel that it is crucial to us that the Central Lobby should be a place to which all who behave peaceably should have access, and we have an obligation to try to bring that about.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that if you are not able to say anything about what the police are doing, you will bring to bear your influence as preserver of the rights of hon. Members and those whom they represent. I hope that you will be able to get a Home Office Minister to come and tell us what is going on—and, if necessary, bearing in mind the views of the House, to give instructions as police authority for the metropolis for the implementation of rather more sensible policies.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not in complete knowledge of exactly what is happening because it is not my responsibility, but I understand that a good many students are involved, and—as an hon. Member has said—a number of them are sitting on Westminster bridge. That makes access to the House difficult. I have heard what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has said, however, and I am sure that it has been noted by the Government Front Bench. In so far as I have any influence, I shall report back.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I reinforce what was said by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer)? Hon. Members on both sides of the House are concerned to learn that students who have written asking to come and see them to raise genuine constituency matters have not been able to do so today. Surely that is a matter of privilege and one that should be investigated by you, Sir. Similarly, the Leader of the House or the Home Secretary should be asked to come to the House this afternoon and make a statement about the disgraceful events that have occurred both inside and outside the precincts of the House.

Mr. Winnick: Where is the Home Secretary?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me say to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who was called to speak yesterday, that I hope that he will not, by seeking to intervene in this manner, delay his colleagues who wish to speak today.

If the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) was not here earlier, let me explain to him that the regulations allow access to the Central Lobby if it is obtained in an orderly fashion. It is not considered fair for hon. Members to go out and fetch their constituents and, as it were, jump the queue, because that causes trouble among others in the queue whose Members of Parliament may not be present at the time. However, I have noted what the hon. Gentleman has said about this matter.

4.33 pm

Mr. Robert Boscawen (Somerton and Frome): I do not wish to add to what has been said on the points of order. However, as one who crossed Westminster bridge not long ago, despite the quiet, calming words of the shadow Leader of the House—the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—some of us have another point of view which we would be prepared to express.

I am honoured and grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for calling me to speak so early in the day. As you know, it is a long time since I have been able to speak in the House owing to the extraordinary way in which we run our affairs. I have to admit that it is probably my own fault. One of the last occasions on which I spoke was late at night, and it happened to be on a social security Bill. It was a long and tedious contribution. As I was bringing it to an end, a charming young Whip put in front of me a piece of paper on which was written, "Please keep going as long as you possibly can." So I had to rumble on.

Mr. Speaker Thomas was not amused. He pulled me up and told me that I was on his blacklist and was unlikely to be called again in a hurry. That lasted for 10 years. It was a long sentence. If I learned any lesson from all that, it was that hon. Members should think twice before complying meekly with the charming words of a Whip.

I did not intend to go into too much detail on the subject of social security, because I know the complexities of it—and much has changed since I last spoke on it. However, I am entirely behind the focusing of extra benefits on those in substantial need, and I believe that the House and the people are behind it, too. What I deplore is the way in which the Opposition seek to hide their past. What is worse, they do not come forward with any new thinking on how to solve the difficult problem of focusing benefit on those who need it without the means test, which they clearly dislike for historical reasons. If they came forward with sensible proposals for getting round that. we should listen to them, but they do not.

There is another thing that I deplore. Every time income support—or supplementary benefit, as it used to be called—is increased, the number on the so-called "official poverty line" is also increased. The Leader of the Opposition used the words "official poverty line" in his response to the Queen's Speech, and I think that he used the word "official" advisedly—because he knew that he was talking nonsense when he said that there were 3 million on the official poverty line.

The leader of the so-called party below, the hon. Member for—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yeovil."]—the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), made one of the silliest speeches that I have ever heard on a Queen's Speech. He said that there were 9 million on the poverty line. The reverse of what I said earlier is also true. If the real-terms amount of supplementary benefit were reduced, the numbers on the poverty line would be cut. Would the Opposition cheer that? Did they cheer it in 1977 when they cut supplementary benefit by 7 per cent. in real terms by sleight of hand?

What was worse was that for several days the Labour Government tried to pretend that they had not cut that benefit. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment knows very well, we had to wring it out of them that by moving the goal posts—in a way too complicated to explain now—they cut benefits. At a time when inflation was running at 23 per cent., they cut benefits back to 15 per cent.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) talked about the smashing of links, referring to Labour's plans to tie pensions to average earnings. Labout smashed the link between pensions and earnings or inflation. Furthermore, Labour smashed the link between pensions and the cost of living. The result in 1977 was a cut in real terms of 7 per cent. The Labour party asks us to contrast what the Government have done with its open-handed generosity, but we have only to consider Labour's record to find the truth. The record is all that we have to go on. It is our only guide to the future. Labour's record on pensioners, the poor, the sick and the needy between 1974 and 1979 was appalling.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is introducing a restrained and sensible Bill to put the Security Service within a statutory framework. I deplore the fact that the Opposition—I am afraid that some of my hon. Friends do it too—use every opportunity to spotlight the problems, shortcomings and treacheries that have gone on in the Security Service during the past 40 years. They do not spotlight the security that has been gained for the British people.

We are far safer for having such a service of able and dedicated men. They are the first line of defence for ordinary and innocent people. Two innocent people were killed in Northern Ireland last night; more could be killed but for the work of the Security Service.

Nothing would be worse than to place supervision of the Security Service in the hands of the House, whether it be a Select Committee or a Committee of permanent Privy Councillors. Ten years in the business management side of the House have taught me that hon. Members, and especially distinguished senior ones not in government, are under enormous pressures from all quarters. They are not the people to supervise such an important service, which is the first line of security for ordinary people. The pressures on them make them not the right animals. It is crucial that the people who watch over the service and the rights of individuals who feel that they have been treated wrongly by it should be impartial and outside the political battle. That is what the Bill proposes.

Among the greatest changes that have taken place during the years when I have not been able to speak in the House, and one which is working on everybody's sub-conscious, is the lessening of tension between the major power blocs—the West and behind the iron curtain. No doubt decisions that have been taken during the past few years have been aided and abetted by Britain's attitude towards maintaining the strength of NATO. The military strength of NATO has been vital for the improvement in security for people in the West and behind the iron curtain. I am proud to have been part of an Administration which maintained our defences and modernised the independent deterrent. Above all, it has maintained strong relations with the United States to ensure that they play their full part in the European theatre.

It was a brave decision to bring cruise missiles to Britain, but that was the turning point in the strengthening of NATO and the change of feeling behind the iron curtain. We should not allow ourselves, or our constituents, to be complacent. The sparks of freedom are now glowing in country after country from the Baltic to the Black sea but if those sparks glow too hot and break out into a conflagration, as they might, we must be careful to show no weakness. There might be a return to dreadful authoritarian rule if Mr. Gorbachev's administration and experiment is overthrown as a result of problems within that circle.

We have learnt how Britain and other Western countries can be lulled into complacency. The first thing that people want to do is turn swords into ploughshares and spend more on the good things of life, such as health, welfare and housing, all of which we want for our people. Nevertheless, I am sure that the Conservative Government's attention will stay firmly fixed on the need, for the time being, to remain strong, resolute and determined. We must not give the impression that we are weak and can be pushed over. We must be quite sure that the changes behind the iron curtain are there for all time before we can really believe that we have come to the end of the cold war.

4.49 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I disagree with practically every point on social security made by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen). He spoke particular nonsense about the previous Labour Government's record on disablement. Having said that, I think that I speak for many hon. Members on both sides of the House when I warmly welcome him back to a speaking role in the Chamber. I hope that it will not be too long before he fully resumes making his controversial speeches. It is always a pleasure to hear him.

The absence of any reference to disabled people in the Queen's Speech was an absolute disgrace. When we think of their problems it is inexcusable for the Government to neglect the relative decline in disabled people's living standards. It is true that today we were offered a crumb of comfort by the Secretary of State when he mentioned a pensioner premium which would be of some assistance to a small number of disabled people. However, that is a crumb and no more. It cannot be made into a figleaf to disguise the Government's failure to help a significant number of disabled people.

The survey by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys established that there are now 6 million disabled people in Great Britain. The Minister of State emphasised that many

"would not regard themselves as disabled or in need of special help for services or cash benefits".

How did he know?

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): The Minister was drawing precisely from the OPCS report. If the right hon. Member for Stoke-on- Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) reads the first report, he will see that they were the words used by the authors of that report.

Mr. Ashley: I read the report as carefully as the Minister, and I accuse him of being selective. The report also explained that some of the people whom he thought were not deserving of special help were people who have difficulty reading newspaper print or following conversations when there is a background noise, and who cannot walk 200 yards without stopping or suffering severe discomfort. Those are people with severe problems and the Minister is utterly wrong to try to dismiss them.

The speech of the Secretary of State was even more disturbing. He claimed that expenditure on benefits for disabled people had risen by 90 per cent. in real terms in 1979. The Minister of State made the same speech at his press conference. The Minister and the Secretary of State omitted to mention that most of that increase was due to the rise in the number of disabled people and in the number claiming benefit. Those are the real reasons for the increase in expenditure. It is not true that the income of disabled people has risen substantially. The Secretary of

[Mr. Ashley]

State tried to excuse himself by saying that the incomes of those receiving disability benefits and allowances had risen. They have, but they represent only a small proportion of the 6 million disabled people in Britain.

The Minister is wrong merely to suggest that we should be pleased that more people are claiming benefits. Of course, we are pleased about more claims, but the fact remains that many disabled people are very badly off. Even worse than that, as a result of the April cuts, 1 million disabled people are now worse off. The withering of the transitional protection is adding to the poverty and disillusionment of many disabled people.

Mr. Scott: There is not a shred of evidence to suggest that there are more disabled people now than there were 10 years ago when the Labour Government were in office. We commissioned a survey which identified the extent of disability much more accurately than the limited survey done by the Labour Government. Under our Government, more and more people have come forward to claim the benefits to which they are entitled. The right hon. Gentleman should be pleased about that and congratulate the Government on their achievement.

Mr. Ashley: I am delighted that the 6 million people have been identified, because we have been pressing for their identification. It is significant that the Minister does not deny that many more people are now claiming benefits. Therefore, I assume that the Minister is prepared to concede—this is my basic point—that the incomes of disabled people have not increased substantially. If he wishes to intervene again to dispute that, I am willing to give way to him. Disabled people have not shared in the prosperity of the country. It is significant that the Minister is not accepting my challenge to intervene again.

The majority of disabled people are pensioners. The Minister, in his press release on the OPCS survey, said that the

"income of disabled and other pensioners is much the same."

That was factually accurate while distorting the truth. Oh, yes. I will explain that. The survey revealed—I hope that the Minister read it as carefully as I did—that once the extra costs of disability are taken into account, the income left for normal living is appreciably less. At 1985 prices it was £83·70 per week for a couple compared with £93·70 for non-disabled people. That is a £10 difference at that income level, which is enormous and has tremendous implications for disabled people.

Disabled pensioners have a hard time because of their disability and old age and have less to live on, but non-pensioner disabled people fare worse compared with able-bodied people. Only 31 per cent. of them work. The average income for a couple, after allowing for disability costs, was £91·70 compared with £136·50 for non-disabled people. That is a difference of £44·80. Therefore, disabled people receive only two thirds of the income of able-bodied people.

Job opportunities and the cost of disability form the crux of the problem for the disabled. The OPCS survey established that costs vary, rising to almost £20 per week for the most severely disabled people. I am sure that the Minister will take my words into account. We must have a comprehensive disability costs allowance which breaks the link between disability and hardship.

I should like the Minister to explain what provision he is making for mentally handicapped people. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health said recently:

"Care in the community is really happening."

That is not borne out by the experience of thousands of mentally handicapped people and their families. There has been a decrease of 15,000 in the number of NHS residential patients in the past 10 years but the concomitant, the necessary community care provision, is not being made. Mentally handicapped people are being shuffled on to their families, thereby imposing appalling burdens on their parents, some of whom are very old. The Government spend £6 million on community care, but it is estimated that informal carers save the Government about £7 billion a year. What a way to save money! They are doing it by exploiting the families of mentally handicapped people, by placing burdens on relatives and by robbing mentally handicapped people of services.

MENCAP has given me a few significant facts about mentally handicapped people. The Taunton and district society for the mentally handicapped undertook a survey in April 1988 of the needs of families in the community. It found 55 mentally handicapped adults living with a lone carer aged over 75 years, 75 mentally handicapped adults living with a lone carer over the age of 65 years and 35·5 per cent.—over one third—of adults with a mental handicap living with carers over pensionable age.

It is time that disabled people received a better deal and a proper income. It is time to provide them with job opportunities, time to outlaw unjustified discrimination and time that the Government stopped talking and acted on behalf of all disabled people.

5.1 pm

Mr. Graham Bright (Luton, South): I am grateful for the opportunity to express my support for the contents of the Gracious Speech. I welcome the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of additional assistance for pensioners. I am certain that it will be welcomed warmly by pensioners in my constituency. Mr. Speaker has asked for short speeches, so I shall stick to that and deal with the employment aspect of today's debate.

The Government are firmly committed to policies to defeat inflation, promote enterprise and sustain growth in output and, especially, employment. The Government's achievements in reducing unemployment and creating the employment training programme are significant because they occurred against a background of steady expansion in the labour force and in the percentage of women returning to work. We have rightly aimed at removing artificial barriers and improving our training programmes.

It is important to recognise how the employment and training initiatives, and the reforms in company law foreshadowed in the Gracious Speech will affect the structure of our economy, which, traditionally, has been dominated by large firms. In the 1960s and 1970s, we encouraged the formation of large firms. We still have more multinational companies than any other EEC country, and about 50 per cent. of our output comes from 100 companies. I am pleased that that process of concentration is over.

The manufacturing share of the 100 largest companies has been falling since 1984. The average share in national employment of the five largest firms in all sectors has been dropping for a decade. Large companies are shedding jobs, and have been doing so steadily for the past few years. Small companies, in which I have a special interest, and medium-sized ones, are creating jobs. At last the Government and people in the community have recognised that small companies are not second-rate. They are important to our economy and have created an enormous number of jobs since 1979.

The number of self-employed people has risen by over 800,000 and management buy-outs have reached record levels. I want that process to continue. It requires the removal of artificial barriers to the employment of women and young people, which is enshrined in current legislation. It also requires an acceptance inside and outside the House that entrepreneurs are not born with the necessary skills. One does not become an entrepreneur overnight because one owns a business. One must know how to manufacture and sell a product, but those skills cannot suddenly be combined overnight.

More publicity should be given to business enterprise programmes and the more advanced private enterprise and management extension programmes that are run by the Training Agency for the Department of Employment. There is certainly a strong case for making admission to the enterprise allowance scheme dependent on receiving training. I should like hon. Members to consider that scheme in the coming year, because it has helped thousands of people to set up their own business. I am concerned that too many people fail. I know that when one sows seeds some grow but others wither away, but too many people fail. We should consider conditional training to ensure that people are equipped with entrepreneurial skills to manage their own business.

A successful small business man who is capable of providing new employment must have multi-disciplinary skills. I cannot emphasise that enough, and as I started my business I understand what it means. It is no use being only a salesman; one must be an accountant and a personnel manager, must understand production and maintenance and be able to turn one's hand to plumbing and electronics. We have failed to produce the multiple-skill discipline, but the Japanese, Germans and Americans have all done so.

Improving our successful training programmes will help to meet industry's demands for skilled manpower. We must not forget that that is more important to small firms than large ones, which carry out their own training. As long as the Government's purchasing and research-and-development contracts are given overwhelmingly to large companies, small ones will not be able to offer comparable training or benefit fairly from existing programmes.

The Ministry of Defence has gone a long way towards breaking down that barrier by providing benefits to small companies, but I should like to underline American experience, which is interesting. It suggests that small firms generate 24 times as many innovations per dollar spent as large companies. There is much to be learned from that experience, and we should provide many incentives, including tax incentives, for companies to demerge. In Silicon valley, small and medium-sized companies are motivating research and development, and I am sure that we could also go down that path.

New jobs are being created by small and medium-sized firms and among the self-employed. Our training programmes, and even our education system, must reflect that. We must get the message across in our schools, colleges and, above all, polytechnics, which seem deafer than ever to the needs of business. I am certain that polytechnics should be doing what they were originally set up to do—to train managers and other people, especially engineers, to go into industry.

Training is the key if we are to continue to press forward with creating employment and generating more than 1,000 new businesses every week. I should like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to continue on the right track and not believe that we have reached our goal. We can reduce unemployment with the aid of small businesses, but only if we train small business men and people with multiple skill disciplines to work in those small industries.

5.10 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Coming from Northern Ireland, I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate on the Loyal Address. It is a pity that many of my constituents and others throughout the Province cannot see the recommendations that have been made for the future government of the kingdom. As the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen) said, last evening two more people perished at the hands of terrorists, and I welcome his reference to that. My hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) heard last evening that two of his constituents who were murdered by Republican terrorists were members of the Roman Catholic faith.

The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) appealed for employment for the disabled and welcomed the nod of approval given by the Secretary of State for Employment. I make a plea to Government Departments to set a standard. During a recent visit to a local health board, I asked whether the board employed its quota of disabled people and it confessed that it did not. Departments throughout the nation should set a standard and give to the disabled the employment for which they are qualified.

In her speech on Tuesday, as reported in column 19 of *Hansard*, the Prime Minister quoted figures which she said proved that pensioners were better off than they were 10 years ago. Many of my constituents are pensioners. Northern Ireland has the highest proportion of pensioner constituents. A quarter of the electorate are pensioners. I have been puzzled by the Prime Minister's figures, which were repeated today by the Secretary of State, that 24 per cent. of pensioners are in the bottom one fifth of national income, compared with 38 per cent. 10 years ago. Perhaps a Minister will tell us where the figures come from.

Since the Prime Minister's speech, I have been doing my best to discover them, and have called upon the Library for assistance. On a practical level, I am aware that pensioners are struggling to make ends meet as we enter the winter months. The number of pensioners has risen by almost 10 per cent. in the past decade, so the number of pensioners on low incomes remains roughly the same now. Is the Prime Minister saying that it is progress to stand still?

The Prime Minister said that domestic electricity costs 8·1 per cent. less in real terms than it did five years ago. According to Age Concern, the far higher costs of fuel in Northern Ireland and the recent changes in the social security system mean that there still are pensioners who cannot afford to heat their homes.

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

I welcome the elaboration of the announcement about the proposed Bill on social security. I trust that it will be used to clear up some of the anomalies and penalties in the last Social Security Act. The most serious of those was the change in housing benefit, which has been dubbed, rightly, an attack on thrift. It forces those with capital above £8,000 to lose some or all of their housing benefit. This measure has affected 2·7 million pensioners, and 1 million households have lost all entitlement to housing benefit.

We were reminded earlier in the debate that high interest rates would remain for some time. Calculations of the tariff imposed on pensioners who no longer benefit from housing benefit because they have capital of about £8,000 range from 13 per cent. on the capital invested to 20·8 per cent. I understand that the Civil Service has told the Social Services Committee that Departments had to face certain challenges and dilemmas. Pensioners, and perhaps hon. Members, would welcome guidance on whether claimants will be considered for a return of 20·8 per cent., as that might help to reduce some of their losses.

The Social Services Committee, in paragraph 24 of its report "Public Expenditure on the Social Services", recommended that

> "the Department monitor extremely carefully the consequences of the changes in housing benefit entitlement and that research is commissioned on their effect, if any, on pensioners' willingness to save."

The honest acknowledgement that there will be pressure on pensioners to spend money runs counter to the Chancellor's guidance that we should not spend, especially on luxuries. There seems to be conflict between two Departments.

I should like the Government to place more emphasis on providing the staff and resources to administer the new social security system, rather than simply cracking down on fraud. There is a place for tackling fraud. There are those who are robbing the nation as well as defrauding people who are entitled to more benefits. Although fraud is a problem, the vast majority of claims are genuine. Staff in social security offices are suffering from stress and experiencing an increasing number of attacks and abuse from frustrated clients. A recent survey by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux found that there was much confusion among people about their benefits. I appreciate, of course, that it is possible to bandy figures about, but we cannot get away from reality. The position is made worse by staff shortages in DSS offices and lack of communication.

I agree with the thrust of the debate: that we cannot help the less well-off if we do not encourage the creation of wealth. I referred earlier to the "attack on thrift" and, following the speech by the hon. Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) on behalf of small businesses, I should like to raise another example of the problem—the unilateral decision to close to traffic Donegal pass—a thoroughway in my constituency—to protect a police station from terrorist attack. I shall give way to no one in my support for the security forces in Northern Ireland in their campaign against terrorism. None the less, it is amazing that, three years after the signing of an agreement to bring us peace, stability and reconciliation and 20 years after the beginning of the terrorist onslaught, a station and a people who have carried on courageously and firmly throughout all previous attacks have been penalised without deep consultation.

It has long been the IRA's aim to make Ulster economically unviable. In order to do that the IRA destroys businesses and jobs, which in turn feed the community's frustration and anger. Next week I shall be putting to the Department of the Environment the case of the small shopkeepers and traders in the Donegal pass area whose livelihoods have been cut off by that action. In one small business, eight people are liable to lose their jobs.

I appreciate the need of the security forces for protection, but it would be far better to enhance security in the area by fortifying the police station at both front and rear and increasing the police and UDR presence on the streets. Tragically, I must tell the House that there is more than a suspicion among folk in the area that an attempt is being made to run down the Donegal pass area. Botanic avenue, leading on from Great Victoria street, has been a vibrant area of commerce and small business for a number of years, despite car parking and other difficulties. Those traders feel that an attack is being made on them and that in the space of 20 years the area will have been so devalued as to allow a new station to be erected on the sites of properties bought at low prices. I mention this because it reflects the worries of a community that has sought to carry on despite terrorism. In a debate dealing with both social security and employment, it is important that we face issues of that kind.

Finally, if we wish to provide job opportunities, there must be something wrong with a Department in Northern Ireland which seems to be making it difficult for Harland and Wolff to go private in order to gain orders. If that does not happen, there will be unemployment and enormous consequential costs in terms of public expenditure. One would have expected far more positive promotion of Harland and Wolff and Shorts in the pre-privatisation period.

5.21 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (Norfolk, South-West): I am glad to have this opportunity to comment on the proposals in the Gracious Speech and in particular to welcome today's announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security about the extra resources to be made available for the poorest and oldest pensioners, for disabled pensioners and perhaps especially for those just above the income support level. Many of us have experience of that problem area, and the announcement will be especially welcome in south-west Norfolk.

I wish to direct my remarks today to the proposal to improve and rationalise the law governing the care and protection of children. There is no doubt that that proposal will be most welcome throughout the House, all the professional disciplines concerned with the care and protection of children and, not least, the parents and families.

The case for reform is undisputed and was compellingly made in the White Paper on the law of child care and family services issued nearly two years ago. While it must be accepted that responsibilities for child care, which span various Government and local government departments, are not always concerned with crises, the fact that there are no fewer than 32 Acts covering child care law is not just unnecessary but might even be described as extravagant. More seriously, it means that the law can be confusing and inconsistent at the very moment when its application to protect the vulnerable needs to be at its most accurate.

Reform is also needed to reflect the profound changes in social attitude and in social work and health practice that have taken place in the 20 years since the 1969 Act and at an accelerated pace in the past 10 years. First, there has been a substantial reduction in the number of children in care, not all of which is explained by demographic change. Ten years ago there were 100,000 children in care—today there are about 60,000. More attention is paid by social service departments today to supporting families in crisis in their own homes. There is less short-term residential care but there is more day care and more work by voluntary organisations, some of which have been in the forefront of work with children in difficulty.

In the past 10 years, social service departments have changed the pattern of provision for children in trouble. They have fewer residential facilities but provide a range of remedies, of which residential care is one, but certainly not the only or automatic remedy. The concomitant of that, however, is that the residential facilities provided, whether by statutory or voluntary agencies, are used for the most difficult and at times the most extreme cases.

I make those points because the proposals in the Gracious Speech will no doubt be applied to the whole broad area of child care law—hence the need for overall clarification of the aforesaid 32 Acts and the need to take into account changes in professional practice. Uppermost in the public mind, however, will be the need to prevent a repetition of the events in Cleveland and of cases such as those of Jasmine Beckford, Kimberley Carlisle and Tyra Henry. Difficult though it may be to achieve, that will be the expectation of the man in the street.

The perceived need for urgent change may well mean that the changes proposed will not include the massive structural alterations necessary to create a family court system, strong though the arguments are for the establishment of such a system. The Magistrates Association, for example, has for years favoured the establishment of a unified family court so that the family work of the present High Court and county courts, the domestic proceedings of the magistrates court and also care proceedings could be dealt with by a unified court. The Association of Directors of Social Services and the Association of County Councils also argue strongly for the creation of a unified court to deal with child and family matters. Such a system is clearly desirable in the longer term and is undoubtedly in the interests of children and families.

Even more desirable and, indeed, essential is the introduction of a legal framework which will support the professionals and balance the rights of parents and the interests of children within a timescale that will prove to the public that the Government treat these matters with the utmost seriousness. If the establishment of family courts means delay in achieving that, the reform of remedies must come first and the reform of structures second.

Some of the proposals in the White Paper, had they been in force already, would certainly have prevented some of the problems that occurred in Cleveland. The use made of place of safety orders, the grounds on which applications were made and what subsequently happened to the children and their families was strongly criticised in the Butler-Sloss report. In some cases, applications were granted when children were already in a place of safety —in hospital. On some occasions, the magistrates concerned failed to make proper inquiries, to notify the justices' clerk or even to keep records.

The proposal in the White Paper for an emergency protection order initially lasting eight days with a possible extension to 15 days would be a more satisfactory means of protecting children in an emergency. It is also more satisfactory that application should be made to a juvenile court rather than to a magistrate sitting alone. As the law stands, there is a lack of clarity about the right of access by parents and of medical examination of children subject to place of safety orders. Parents should have reasonable access to their chidlren and their consent should be sought for all but urgent medical treatment. That aspect, too, requires clarification.

The report on the Kimberley Carlisle case suggested the need for a child assessment order. The man in the street must be incredulous to find that no such power exists and that there is no way of requiring a child to be produced for medical examination without giving authority for his or her removal from home. Evidence of the need for reform is overwhelming, it is accepted on all sides and it is certainly regarded by the public as long overdue.

What is also needed—and what, to some extent, has already been produced in the DHSS guidelines "Working Together" issued last July—is an insistence by Government, local government, managers and the public that professionals working in the field clearly understand that the child and the family must come first, especially in urgent cases of suspected physical or sexual abuse. The child and the family must come first, not professional differences or professional wounded dignities. In the words of the Butler-Sloss inquiry:

> "it is essential that whenever one agency becomes concerned that a child may be at risk they share that information with other agencies."

In my county, where these proposals will be welcome, we learned that lesson in the 1970s from the all too well publicised case of Stephen Merrs. Since then, there has been good co-operation between social services, the police, health authorities, the probation and education services and the efficient area review committee to monitor progress. The social services department takes the lead in updating other agencies and in acting as key workers in reported cases of suspected abuse—which, significantly, have risen from 206 in 1980 to 963 in 1987. However, there is never room for complacency. Cases can be missed and they can be misjudged.

What was so tragic about Cleveland was that there, too, co-operation between agencies had been good. The area review committee had been replaced, just before the crisis broke, with a joint child abuse committee, but in the relevant months the working parties of that committee consistently failed to agree to implement their own guidelines on sexual abuse. The police and social services held opposing views and there was a rift between the medical views of the paediatricians and the senior police surgeon.

I do not believe that professionals working in such a delicate and difficult area—which of necessity requires firm guidelines that will withstand the strain of crises—can afford the luxury of professional disagreement to the extent that it affects professional practice. The proposal in "Working Together" for area child protection committees

[Mrs. Gillian Shephard]

suggests that there should be a standardised working practice throughout the country, and that is welcome. However, magistrates and justices' clerks should be included in consultation, working together and training for all of that area of work.

Legal reforms are essential. The law should not create reefs or hurdles that make it more difficult for parents to understand their rights and for professionals to do their job. It must be simplified, clarified and brought up to date to reflect modern society and modern professional practice. Side by side with that legal reform must be a recognition by professionals that in that respect—the protection of the vulnerable—those professionals form a seamless garment. That is clearly understood by many, indeed most, of those working in the field, although where people are concerned errors will happen again and again. The public will not understand and certainly will not forgive errors that come from professional separatism and feuding.

The legislation needs to help and support the professionals who, in turn, must help, support and protect those vulnerable families and children who depend on them.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know that other hon. Members have raised points of order about the students who have come to the House today. I have just been to St. Thomas's hospital and been informed that 20 injured persons have been sent to casualty. I asked St. Thomas's to ring Westminster hospital, and I understand that a further seven people have been admitted to casualty there. That means that 27 of our constituents, who have come here quite properly to see their Members of Parliament, have suffered because of police action, which was witnessed by many hon. Members, including myself. Horses have been used, with the traditional method of lines of police opening up to allow the horses through, and buses have been used like a line of tanks. It is a disgrace.

I raise this matter because every year we send an instruction—a social order—to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis telling him to keep the streets open. We do not instruct him to batter and bash people who come here for the traditional purpose of approaching their Members of Parliament on matters of concern to them. I do not know whether the Home Secretary intends to make a statement, but I do know that the debate cannot properly proceed if the House does not take cognisance of what has happened on Westminster bridge, which is within sight of the House. Some action should be taken to summon the Commissioner to explain police conduct during the past few hours.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. There is little that I can add to what Mr. Speaker said in response to earlier points of order. As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, Mr. Speaker is responsible for the precincts of the House and those immediately outside, and he has ensured that they are clear.

The right hon. Gentleman is raising matters that concern institutions that are not the responsibility of Mr. Speaker. However, it is my understanding that Mr. Speaker has asked for a report from the police on what is happening outside his responsibility. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, such matters are the responsibility of the police and, ultimately, the Home Secretary.

Mr. Heffer: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to delay the House, but I have been talking to some of the young students outside. They have letters from their Members of Parliament saying that they can enter the House and speak to them. On their way to the House—they had not even reached the bridge; they were simply walking along the Embankment—they were directed elsewhere. They produced their letters and said that they were going to see their Members of Parliament. They were actually told that if they continued they would be arrested. I do not know where we are going. There should be a statement from a Minister so that we can raise these matters with him.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Mr. Speaker has no authority to bring a Minister to the Chamber. The points of order raised earlier and those raised now have undoubtedly been heard by members of the Treasury Bench.

5.36 pm

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): I do not intend to comment on the very important points raised by the hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard). I want to take this opportunity to express my great concern, and that of many others, about the growing skills shortage. The problem has been developing for a number of years. The sheer complacency of the Government about such a serious matter is most alarming. No one could possibly pretend that there is a shortage of people available for real training. Unemployment levels in many parts of Britain, including my constituency, are still disgracefully high. A Government who manage to produce both a record level of unemployment and a dramatic shortage of skilled workers demonstrate a rare degree of incompetence.

The problem affects industries at many levels. For example, the Engineering Council is constantly reminding the House and the Government about the inadequate number of graduate engineers coming out of universities and polytechnics each year. The Trade and Industry Select Committee has just completed a long and detailed inquiry on information technology. Witness after witness told us of the difficulties facing companies trying to find skilled people. We were given an estimate of up to 30,000 unfilled vacancies in data processing.

Manufacturing, Science and Finance, a major union in the industry, said that the shortage of skilled people was the major factor inhibiting the information technology industry in the United Kingdom. Other evidence showed that the annual demand for graduates in that industry is currently 5,900, rising to 8,200 within the next five years. On present trends, there is apparently no possibility that the number of people coming out of universities and polytechnics will meet that demand.

How have the Government reacted to that? They go to the EEC and tell our Community partners that they are opposed to any increase in expenditure on the COMMETT programme. Many hon. Members know that the COMMETT scheme sponsors and develops close links between industry and higher education establishments in technology training. The Commission says that the present budget of £48 million a year is totally inadequate. The

Government consider that to be far from inadequate and want to reduce that amount. That is how they react to the serious shortages of graduates leaving higher education with degrees in engineering subjects.

We have to set all that against the fact that in Britain the number of young people in higher education, as a percentage, is far smaller than in all other industrial countries. In the 20 to 24-year-old age group, 20 per cent. are in higher education in Britain, compared with 56 per cent. in the United States of America, 42 per cent. in Canada, 39 per cent. in Sweden and 24 per cent. in South Korea, which is now developing into a major competitor in many industries. How can we go on like this? Surely no one can claim that freezing student grants and introducing repayable loans will help us in that respect.

Skills shortages occur in many industries, but I shall refer only to two or three further examples, because of the time factor. Local authorities are worried about the shortage of environmental health officers and trading standards officers—people who have a vital role in protecting the public and who are the key people in consumer protection. There are hundreds of unfilled vacancies for such posts. The number of people leaving universities and polytechnics with environmental health qualifications is less than half the number needed annually. The problem is becoming significantly worse each year.

Local authorities say that the problem is that there are not enough training places at universities and polytechnics. I wrote to the Under-Secretary of State responsible for higher education. He said that that was not the problem; that some courses had been under-subscribed; and he then washed his hands of the matter. Yet somebody should be concerned about it. Public health is being put at risk, and somebody in the Government should be worried about that.

In the other skills shortage about which I shall talk, there is no question of courses being under-subscribed—they are not. Yet the Government have decided to cut the number or places at veterinary schools by about 10 per cent., although the number of applicants is far in excess of the places available. People with good qualifications are not accepted on courses, but the Government are cutting the number of places available.

Many people think of vets as amiable chaps who look after cats, dogs and parrots, but in fact their vital role is to protect the public against diseased and infected meat and dairy products. Someone should be worried about that. The Government react by cutting the facilities for training new vets. Some of their Lordships must be concerned about that, in view of the serious outbreak of food poisoning in the other place not long ago. Incidents of food poisoning are increasing notably year by year, so it is precisely the wrong time to run short of environmental health officers, trading standards officers and vets. I see no sign that the Government are worried about that.

I shall now move from tragedy to farce and comment on the employment training scheme. There is serious doubt about how much real training will be involved in the so-called training scheme. One reason why we doubt the commitment of the Government—I am glad to see that the Secretary of State for Employment is here—is that they have abolished most of the industrial training boards and their own Training Commission. How seriously are they committed to training? Who will monitor the level of training that takes place on the so-called employment training scheme?

I shall quote a few sentences from papers that have been put out in my area by three of the managing agencies that exist to operate the scheme on behalf of the Government. It would be unfair to name them, as they presumably all operate on the same lines. The papers are issued to the public—or to their clients, as they call them. One paper says:

> "This is work you can request during your normal visits and which is covered by the set charge of £1 a week.
> Social visits—Chatting, sitting with the elderly or the infirm
> Prepare simple meals . . .
> Post letters . . .
> Run errands . . .
> Collecting and filling prescriptions . . .
> Clean the bath or sink."

Another scheme offers shopping, collecting pensions, cleaning, fire-lighting and wheelchair outings.

The people who will be engaged on these operations are described as trainees—I emphasise that word. Another scheme offers light repairs to trousers, skirts and curtains and a bit of gardening. What kind of training is that supposed to be? That has nothing to do with training. It is undermining the social services. It is providing a home help service on the basis of cheap labour. No one can pretend that 18 or 19-year-olds, however splendid and caring they may be, can provide a proper substitute for the dedicated, mature women who are the backbone of the home help service.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Norman Fowler): The hon. Gentleman must understand the history of the programme. The community programme has provided community services of the kind to which he has referred for a number of years, but the community programme did not provide training in addition. The situation arose—which I am sure the hon. Gentleman deplores—where people provided a service for the community, but did not receive training to enable them to find jobs. We are trying to consolidate some of the community services and to give people training so that they can fill the vacancies that are available now. The hon. Gentleman should consider the matter more carefully if he has a serious interest in reducing unemployment.

Mr. Crowther: I entirely understand the point that the Secretary of State has made. I am aware that the employment training scheme has taken over from the community programme. However, at least the community programme did not pretend to be a training scheme. I cannot see that the activities that I have described have anything to do with training. The employment training scheme is a form of cheap labour to undermine the social services. I can see no other explanation for it.

There is no shortage of opportunities for putting young people into proper training schemes. People are desperately needed in the skills that I have already mentioned. During their time on the employment training scheme, our young people will be running errands and doing a bit of gardening. They will not be trained to fill the 30,000 vacancies in data processing, for example. Will they be trained to go into the innumerable unfilled vacancies in a variety of important skills? They will not. It is nonsense to pretend that the scheme has anything to do with skill training. If the Government are seriously concerned about training, they should enable people to take real

[Mr. Crowther]

apprenticeships and to join training schemes that will equip them with the skills that industry so desperately needs. The present scheme is no substitute.

Without that crucial training for skill, this country will go naked into the single European market. If, as a nation, we do not have the skills to match our competitors, both inside and outside the Community, we shall be eaten alive inside 10 years.

5.49 pm

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): There is one sector of our vibrant economy in which employment is falling. Opposition Members may jeer about that decrease or, in their paradoxical way, even cheer about it. It is in the great service industries of the City of London. There are a number of reasons for the fall in the number of City jobs, not all of them bad. For example, in the Government bond markets, where there were far too many players, substantial numbers have been laid off, precisely because the supply of their lifeblood—Government debt—has itself been stopped. There is no more Government debt —only repayment—and I imagine that gilt dealers are the only people in the City of London who may be hoping for a revival in the Labour party's fortunes.

A number of people in the investment, banking and financial services industries have also been laid off, in part because of over-expansion prior to big bang, in part because the security markets are dull, and in part because of the welcome competition that has been introduced into the City by the Government, which has cut prices and therefore forced cuts in costs. At the same time, the City is faced with the ever-increasing costs associated with the implementation of the Financial Services Act 1986.

As announced in the Gracious Speech, we are now to have a Companies Bill. That Bill will have the chance to increase employment not just in the City, but, far more important, throughout the entrepreneurial business community, which has provided almost all the net new jobs in Britain.

The Companies Bill will need to do several things. First, it will need to simplify company accounts. Millions of people are now new shareholders who have been brought into the capitalist fold. The old, unreadable company accounts, behind which the accountant could hide in a camouflage that only he could understand, are incomprehensible to them and need to be simplified. Company accounts must be improved, within tighter parameters. They must be made more easily comprehensible, with certain factors, such as the value of the assets of a company being made more clear. That will be notably tame when it comes to valuing "goodwill", as we ever more develop the service industries. Goodwill is the difference in value between a company's assets and the price that another is prepared to pay for them.

Thousands of new companies have been created each year under this Conservative Administration, creating more jobs than ever. Yet they have to spend too much time and money wrestling with the red tape required in the public accounts that they need to produce every year, under a system that is at least 50 years out of date.

The second area with which the Companies Bill will have to deal, if it is to increase employment, as many of us hope it will, is mergers and acquisition policy, both national and international. I trust that nothing in the Companies Bill will make takeovers more difficult, more murky or more prone to Government interference, except solely on the ground of competition. Takeovers, national or international, increase prosperity and investment; most important of all, they increase jobs. The creation of jobs of the right kind stems directly from the market for takeovers.

If the Companies Bill does nothing else, it must allow more openness than we have had in the past. It must ensure that in the process of a takeover wrongdoers are spotted earlier and are stopped with a heavier hand than in the past. Like company accounts, takeovers, mergers and acquisitions should be made more straightforward and easier.

I hope that the Government will not introduce into the Bill anything that smacks of protectionism or xenophobia. This country thrives on having its markets open to the world—its financial markets as well as its industrial markets. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment knows, that freedom increases prosperity and the number of modern productive jobs. Britain thrives in overseas markets. After Japan, we are the largest creditor nation in the world, with a high and growing net overseas investment. The fact that in America and Europe tens of thousands of people wake up in the morning and go to work for a British company increases the wealth and employment in this country. It is no accident that countries with the highest investment overseas, such as Japan and Switzerland, have the lowest unemployment within their own boundaries.

The new self-confidence of British industry has encouraged it to fight for, and capture, some of the most famous commercial names in the world; nor have big companies alone led the massive investment of British wealth overseas for the benefit of the British people. Overseas takeovers by British industry represent millions of pounds and thousands of companies, and guarantee prosperity, jobs and income in the British home market.

All that is done through the City of London. It is imperative that the City should remain unencumbered with nationalist measures, and that it should be free to act on the instructions of British industry anywhere in the world. Of course, that means we must maintain a two-way street; and the more bustle there is on that street the better. It means that British companies must be free to purchase and invest abroad and that foreign companies must be able to do the same, and receive a welcome when they invest in Britain. Nothing is more economically illiterate or politically unsound than to bemoan each and every act of foreign investment or takeover. Such acts should be welcomed as acts of confidence in Britain. They should be welcomed by all who seek to further our prosperity and to increase the employment opportunities available to our people.

Ownership is becoming ever more fluid, and it is becoming a less important factor in international wealth creation. A few months ago I was on the north slope of Alaska, from which the United States gets most of its domestic oil. The major oil company there is BP. But no manager on those oilfields felt that he was working for a Limey company. Indeed, he would have been wrong to think so, as at least 30 per cent. of BP is owned by people outside the United Kingdom.

The ownership of new global corporations is becoming ever more diffuse and muddled, and it is rapidly changing.

That is a good thing, and only the most old-fashioned would bemoan it. The Government would do a great disservice to our wealth creators and job creators, to the City of London and to industry, if they were tempted to tip into the Companies Bill any measure restricting this move to greater globalism, or any barrier to Britain's industrial investment in the world and the world's investment in Britain.

5.59 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Recently we have seen a credit-driven consumer boom. In the past couple of weeks I have received an unsolicited letter from a credit company offering me a plastic card which would solve all my earthly problems, an unsolicited letter from my bank offering me a large loan, and a letter from my building society offering to give me 90 per cent. of the difference between the valuation of my house and the rest of the outstanding mortgage. The covering letter was lyrical in stating that if I wanted a new car, a holiday in the sun or a conservatory, I was not to delay—the money was ready and waiting for me. I am certain that other hon. Members have had similar letters, and in every tabloid newspaper the public is offered credit.

As a result, we have had a big increase in demand. The Government have finished with monetarism and do not worry too much about the money supply, but demand has come up against capacity restraints. Because of deficient investment in past years, British industry has become debilitated and enfeebled, so cannot cope with the extra demand; and because of the lack of training as soon as the economy picks up, we run into skills shortages.

Manufacturing production has just returned to its 1973 level, but the British public are now buying 25 per cent. more manufactures than in 1973, so we are importing electronic goods, household appliances, motor cars and clothing and much else. That has led to a horrendous trade deficit and to a balance of payments crisis.

However, a part of that demand has gone into the domestic economy, which has led to a growth in employment and is welcome, but I wonder how much extra employment there has been. Some Government statements are exaggerated and it is difficult to get a clear picture. On 2 November, the Select Committee had as a witness Mr. Bernard Casey, who is a research fellow at the Policy Studies Institute. He said:

> "The statistics have been mucked around with very badly and it is difficult, much more difficult, to know what is going on and that is a great problem."

Britain counts unemployment differently from other countries. We count the number of people in receipt of benefit, whereas they count the number of people seeking work. Benefit figures bear little relation to the number of people looking for jobs. To be unregistered unemployed is as distressing as to be registered unemployed.

One of the changes since the previous Gracious Speech is that all 16 and 17-year-olds have been eliminated from the figures altogether because they are no longer eligible for benefit. Again, one would imagine that the drop in unemployment would be reflected in the extra number of people employed, but there does not seem to be much connection between the two. The number of people in employment has not increased as much as the decline in the number of claimants.

Full-time employment in manufacturing continues to decline, but there has been a growth in part-time employment. A large number of these part-time jobs are taken by full-time workers who take a second job, so are counted twice. Because only part-time work is available, many people do two or three part-time jobs, so we get double and treble counting. The picture is murky. Further evidence is that the number of vacancies has not increased. It is difficult to get at the facts because we are not necessarily comparing like with like as a result of the changes in the way in which statistics are compiled.

Ten years ago we had 90,000 people who had been unemployed for two years or more. Now there are seven times that. The number of people unemployed for over five years continues to increase, even according to the benefit figures. If the Secretary of State disputes that, he can give us the figures when he replies, but they are my figures. What is the future for the unemployed?

The trade deficit is unsustainable in the long term, so the Chancellor of the Exchequer is now squeezing the economy. Some of us can remember the days of stop-go, after which we had North sea oil which solved that problem. But the revenues from the oil have been wasted, and we are returning to a classic stop. Billions of pounds will be taken out of consumption if the Chancellor's measures work. If we are to end our overseas deficit, the growth is likely to slow to a rate which will be inconsistent with a growth in employment.

The Chancellor's weapon is increasing interest rates, but I cannot think of a cruder, blunter weapon than that. That is supposed to bear down on inflation, but it is more likely to bear down on investment. Borrowing may not be stopped because people will be encouraged to borrow more because the prices of their houses are rising so fast. Lenders, who are receiving higher interest rates and find larger payments going into their accounts, may spend that extra income, so we may get the worst of all possible worlds and the measure may be highly counterproductive. If interest rates push up the exchange rate higher that it would be otherwise—that is already happening—it will hit British exports and will not help us with our balance of payments deficit.

It is prudent, therefore, to expect that unemployment will remain static at about 2·5 million or 3·5 million, depending on the definition of the unemployed. The Government take that view and have taken it into account in their public expenditure forecasts. We have the so-called British economic miracle and so-called overheating, while about 3 million people remain unemployed because of the past lack of investment and training.

The Government's method of approaching long-term unemployment is employment training, which I fear is going off at half cock. The Secretary of State knows that the job training scheme, the previous programme which was similar, was a complete flop, but the Government have not learnt the lessons of that failure or rectified it. Employment training is grossly underfunded and is an inadequate response to skills shortages and the plight of the long-term unemployed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) pointed out, the quality of training is also suspect. During the six-month courses, only two days a week are directed to training and the other three are for so-called work experience. The Government invest £17·50 a week in each trainee. What private training organisation would offer to train anybody for that sum?

There is a derisory supplement on top of benefit of £10 a week or £5 a week after removing travel allowances.

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

Those who move from the community programme will see major cuts in the allowance that they receive. I cannot understand why the Secretary of State will not allow employers of the trainees on their three days' work experience to top up the allowance. Under YTS, an employer may top up the allowance, but under ET, he may not. It would not cost the Government a penny. It is perverse not to allow employers to top up. Work experience means doing what an employer tells one to do for three days a week, and if the employer wants to give a top-up I should have thought that the Government would have allowed it.

When the Select Committee on Employment interviewed representatives of the Training Commission, they suggested four reasons why the previous programme failed. First, there had to be realistic targets in the form of numbers. Secondly, there had to be adequate financial incentives. Thirdly, the programme had to be sold better to employers. Fourthly, and importantly, the Government had to win the co-operation of the partners necessary to deliver the programme. Those partners are employers, local authorities, voluntary organisations and trade unions.

The Government did not take that lesson on board and have not gained that co-operation. They have not obtained agreement. The programmes can be run only on the basis of voluntary co-operation and consensus. It is all very well for the Government to have a majority in the House and to push through measures here, but that does not solve the problem outside the House, where they must deal with the trade unions and obtain their co-operation. One of the main lessons that the Government must learn is that the trade unions are not the enemy within. If any of the programmes are to work, the trade unions must be regarded as an essential partner.

Recently I have been obliged to follow in the footsteps of the Secretry of State around various foreign parts. In Boston, Massachusetts, and in Sweden we spoke to the same people as he did. In each place that we visited in Sweden, the people said, "I have brought you some more people from England. You will remember that nice Mr. Fowler. Here are some of his parliamentary colleagues." The Secretary of State will agree that none of those countries regards the trade unions as enemies. In Boston, Sweden and Germany the unions are considered valuable and essential partners. The Government have got it wrong, and the schemes will not work until they change their attitude and work with the unions.

The new programme appears to be flopping because it is not attracting enough people. The target is 600,000, with 300,000 at any given time. The Secretary of State will tell us how many people are on the programme, but I doubt whether the figure is even 100,000. If I am right, that represents less than one third of the target. The programme will flop because the Government did not learn the lessons.

I wish to be constructive, so I shall give the Secretary of State some suggestions. When he announced the scheme, I suggested that he should double the allowance. That modest idea would cost £180 million. My second suggestion is that he should give a job guarantee to everyone who goes on the programme. Sweden had a temporary jobs programme. It is no longer necessary, because it has little unemployment. The figure of 1·8 per cent. is largely made up of people who cannot speak Swedish or who are severely disabled. But when it had what it considered to be serious unemployment, at 3·5 per cent., it had a temporary jobs programme in which local authorities and employers were given a subsidy to employ additional workers. In the previous Parliament, the Select Committee published a report advocating job guarantees for the long-term unemployed on that basis. We could start that type of programme for those who have been unemployed for two years or more, which would involve 600,000 people.

There is work enough to be done. One need only consider the state of our housing, house repairs and social services to know how much work there is to be done. I was told that the Secretary of State was impressed by what he saw in Sweden. I urge him to adopt a similar programme. If we gave a subsidy to the private employer to take on additional workers, it would mean that, instead of paying benefit to the unemployed person to do nothing, we would pay that money to the employer to take on an additional worker at the proper rate for the job.

Mr. Ian Bruce: If the hon. Gentleman agrees that we should encourage everyone to take up some form of training, would that not force people who take unemployment benefit for doing nothing to accept that training or lose their benefit?

Mr. Leighton: I am not sure who is supposed to be taking benefit but doing nothing. The programme should be voluntary. The unemployed want to work; they want proper jobs. I do not believe that the majority of the unemployed are scroungers who do not want to work, and there is no evidence to suggest it. Instead of adopting a heavy tone, it would be far better to introduce a voluntary scheme and try to win people's co-operation.

It is a crazy idea to abolish the Training Commission, which used to be the Manpower Services Commission. The Government have been trying to undermine the MSC for some time. The MSC was meant to be an independent organisation—at some distance from the Government—of partners in the labour market. But increasingly the Government gave the orders for the MSC and turned it into a tool, or handmaiden, of Government. A year ago, they ended the balanced structure of the MSC by swamping it with an extra six employers' representatives. They were already planning the White Paper, which I understand will be published in a few weeks' time, in which the entire nature of the organisation would be changed. The Government pounced with glee on the TUC decision on employment training. That vote was the cue to abolish the MSC, not the cause. We shall wish to scrutinise that White Paper.

On Monday and Tuesday next week, I have been invited, with the chairmen of employment committees of other national Parliaments by the Commission in Brussels to attend a seminar to discuss the social dimension of the single market. I suspect that they will ask me for the official British view, so I must get it right. I have done some research and I have discovered a speech by the Secretary of State. He will tell me whether I should use his words in Brussels. On 7 November he said:

> "There is an understandable concern that the creation of the single market in 1992 could open the door to a flood of new labour market regulations. Let me make the Government's position on this absolutely clear."

Where would politicians be without that phrase?

> "We believe more regulation is the wrong approach . . . we do not welcome—and we will resist—a formal, legalistic, regulated system of worker participation; of rights for workers; and of regulation of part-time work and similar measures."

For good measure, let me quote a question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson). It says:

> "To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to convene a national conference involving representatives of Government, business and trade unions in order to discuss and evolve a national strategy for the social dimension of the single European market."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 1988; Vol. 140, c. *407*.]

The blunt monosyllabic reply was no.

When I am asked what is the British attitude to the social dimension, I shall say that the Government do not believe in it; they do not want it; they are against the social dimension.

Mr. Fowler: I hate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's fun, but when he visits Brussels for a couple of days he will take with him the employment figures and he will point out that more jobs have been created in Britain since 1983 than in the rest of the EC and it is the reduction of unemployment and the creation of new jobs that we regard as the real social dimension.

Mr. Leighton: The Secretary of State has just confirmed what I said—that he does not believe in what is called the social dimension. I shall take the employment figures if I can obtain accurate ones. There is some difficulty in that.

I shall have to say that, if I understand the Queen's Speech aright, the Government are about to take away workers' rights in small companies. We shall have a sort of two-tier labour market, with some rights in large companies but none in small companies. The Secretary of State will remove the protection for young workers—the most vulnerable. Presumably, there will be Bills to encourage small boys to go up chimneys. I suppose that is one of the Victorian values.

The Government are going backwards. Their policy is perverse, misguided and misconceived. The Secretary of State should be bringing forward plans for child care, about which we have heard nothing. There should be real programmes for training. Employment training does not affect the 90 per cent. of people who have employment. He should have a policy of co-operation with the work force instead of whittling away what few rights they have.

6.21 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Like many other hon. Members, I welcome the news, which will be gladly received by so many of our pensioners, that we are to see an improvement in the means-tested benefits that are coming forward. As we have often said, improvements in our economy allow us to help those most in need. It should be underlined that it is not just that people who are over 75 have not had the benefit of Serps; unfortunately, they had a Labour Government who destroyed their savings. Those who thought that they had been thrifty enough to ensure that they would be well looked after in their old age saw their savings being whittled away.

I want to talk in particular about employment. There has been a real change in the climate over the past few years. I have regular meetings with DSS managers in my constituency, and I ask them about the market. It has been excellent to see unemployment in my constituency virtually halved over the past two years.

Seven, eight or nine years ago many Tories were reluctant to talk about reductions in employment. They basically said that in future manufacturing industry would not be able to increase employment. I was one of those few foolish people who said that unemployment would come down, and indeed it is doing so. I welcome that.

Despite the excellent figures, we should all constantly remind ourselves that there are still far too many people unemployed. We still have an enormous task to ensure that those who are still on the unemployment register, or who are becoming unemployed because of changes in work practices, will quickly be put back in to work.

I welcome the changes in YTS. We are twisting arms a little, but sometimes that is a sensible way of ensuring that people leaving school will not sit on the social security register and expect not to continue their training or obtain work. As Opposition Members have said, if somebody is to lose his YTS benefit, he must have had a genuine offer of work. It is not good enough for the Government simply to promise people a YTS place. If they cannot fulfil that promise, people should not lose their benefit. I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider that carefully and ensure that people who have not had the opportunity of youth training do not lose benefit.

I welcome the tightening up of the test for work. The long-term unemployed can in time begin to justify the fact that they are no longer looking for work. I ran an employment agency for 12 years. It is important to understand that people need to have their morale boosted, and need to be wound up again to go out and find work. It is not that such people are lazy, but that while several years earlier they may have made valiant efforts to find work, they just stop looking. That is why the Government were right to set up job clubs and so on, to help such people.

The enterprise allowance scheme has been excellent in encouraging people who have always assumed that they must look to others to find employment for them, to create their own employment. That has been one of the Government's great successes and one that we cannot emphasise too much.

The restart programme is also excellent. It helps people, through the medium of job clubs or employment training schemes, to feel that the Government are trying to give them the boost and help that they need. The message coming from south Dorset, from Weymouth and from that area is that the employment training schemes are working. We must congratulate the companies and the civil servants who are making the scheme work well.

As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, good quality training is essential, but we must ensure that there is a market, with sufficient training places, so that people can choose the type of training that they want. It is no good Opposition Members drawing attention to all the vacancies within the computer industry. We need people with the right educational background in the first place in those jobs. Semi-literate people with learning difficulties will welcome fairly simple jobs and simple training. After all, a large number of people on our unemployment registers require simple training to get them back into simple work. That is useful and helpful. Opposition

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

Members are wrong to suggest that we are undermining the social services fabric of Britain by training people to help the elderly and the social services.

I welcome all that we are doing. We should be concentrating on getting people back to work. A job start bonus might be a good idea. We know that people find it difficult to return to work, to make that jump from dependency on benefit, particularly if they have children and receive housing and other benefits. It is too easy for people to fall into the black economy, and even to become involved in benefit fraud.

I have often said that it would be sensible for the Government to use sincere and easy methods to discover whether people are working. I ran an employment agency in Yorkshire for 12 years. For the first eight years, neither the DHSS, as it was, nor the Department of Employment inquired whether there was any fraud among people who had registered for work with me, who were working on a temporary basis, and were also registered for benefit. All our workers were signed on. We informed the tax office that those people worked for us, but the information was not available to the people at the social security office—or at least, they did not seem to look at it—and it was not available to the unemployment benefit office.

One gentleman was caught because he was doing three jobs and receiving benefit. He decided that someone with whom he had been working had probably shopped him, so he decided to shop that person. After seven years, for the first time, the Department sent someone to our employment office to ask for a list of all those who were working for us. We replied, "Of course, we can give you a list. We are happy to do so." We supplied the list, and it turned out that over 30 per cent. of the people who were drawing wages from my company, who were paying taxes and national insurance, were defrauding the social security system.

I ran the company for another five years, but, after we volunteered to the social security and unemployment benefit offices that we were happy to provide them with any information that they required, not once did those responsible come back and check whether others were defrauding the system. In the present climate, when we need more people to work and to be on training schemes, it is important to ensure that those who are in genuine need receive their benefit, but that we catch those who are ripping off the system.

I welcome the fact that we shall get away from the silly and archaic rules whereby young people and women are not allowed to work in a normal, sensible way like the rest of us. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment knows Chelmsford well. When I was a youngster, I used to get up fairly early in the morning and sort papers before the paper-boys went out. My normal evening job was to deliver groceries, and my Saturday job was to sell records at Bond's store—I am sure that my right hon. Friend remembers that well. In the summer, when I did not have to go to school, I worked at the County Cleaners during the day, and in the evening shift I worked at the laundry next door, doing the sheets for Butlin's. I am sure that that experience did me no harm and that I should benefit from returning to such a working environment these days, with the lazy life that I lead as a Member of Parliament.

I was probably breaking all the laws under the sun, but it does no harm to young people when they have the opportunity to go out, particularly during the holidays, to learn about what real work or manual labour are all about. Those who are doing training schemes and who want to go on and do extra work should be allowed to do so.

The only sour note of my speech—I say this advisedly, with one of the junior Ministers present—is that we heard nothing about the dock labour scheme in the Queen's Speech. I am sure that a proposal will be made in the near future to get rid of that one anomaly in our employment law.

6.33 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): The hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) made one valid point with which all Opposition Members will agree, and we hope that the Secretary of State will take it on board. It was about youngsters aged 16 or 17 who do not have the opportunity to go on a training scheme, and who should not be deprived of their sole source of income. That is happening up and down the country—for example, in the city that I have the honour to represent, together with the Secretary of State for Employment, Birmingham. However, the right hon. Gentleman does not like the word "Birmingham" to be attached to the title of his constituency. If schemes are available, that is fine, but we know that hundreds or thousands—the number is indeterminate—are deprived of their benefit income when they have not had the opportunity to participate in a scheme, which is unfair.

Today's theme is social security, but I should like to refer also to other aspects of the Queen's Speech. The result of one narrow aspect of the Government's social security policy is that mothers in my constituency are deprived of a total of £20,000 a week as a result of the freezing of child benefit in 1988-89 and the failure to uprate it properly in 1985. The mothers of 20,000 children in my constituency are now deprived of more than £20,000 a week, and little of it will come back by way of family credit—that is not the intention. I suspect that, if more than one quarter came back, the Government's budget would be thrown into confusion.

It would be churlish not to congratulate the Chancellor of the Exchequer on finding a little money for the pensioners. The credit does not seem to lie with the Secretary of State for Social Security. However, in the west midlands, particularly Birmingham, pensioners are bitter about a potential threat to their concessionary bus passes as a result of the Department of the Environment's policy. That crucial point is not touched on in the Queen's Speech.

The Secretary of State for Social Security today made great play of statistics. Some are valid, but the vast majority of our constituents do not believe the Government when they tell them that they are much better off. Is it any wonder that, in the midst of what by any stretch of the imagination is a retail boom for those who are doing all right, one shop in my constituency that has constant queues of customers, often on the pavement and round the corner, specialises in selling yesterday's bread? That is no criticism of the shop or the product—the shop is conforming to health standards—but let us face the facts. It has already been said that far fewer elderly people die of hypothermia in the colder European countries such as Scandinavia and Germany than in this country. I have never seen any examples of a retail boom in the European countries that are our economic competitors in shops that specialise in selling yesterday's bread. What an indictment of 10 years of Thatcherism.

A week ago I received a letter from one of my constituents, an elderly gentleman in his 70s. Last December I assisted him, as any other hon. Member would, by making inquiries and obtaining supplementary benefit for him and his wife of 41p a week. He had been trying to get more money for ages. He said that he would be eternally grateful for that 41p a week. The couple had already been to the DHSS and had been turned down. Mr. Payne says:

> "since April 1988 all this has ended.
>
> I am 77 years of age and my wife is 74. We own our 2 up and 3 down house in Kingstanding and as it is 55 years old it requires quite a lot of maintenance such as pointing of the outside walls and the renewal of the cast iron guttering and rain pipes.
>
> Our total income is £68·80 per week . . . and we have £843 savings in a Building Society, which we are saving for funeral expenses.
>
> As I have said, you got us Supplementary Benefit of 41p, and we did not pay General Rates, but of course since April 1988 we have lost the Supplementary, and we are now paying £3·28 General Rates per week and £2·55 Water Rates per week. Also my wife's late mother suffered from glaucoma, and lost her sight so that can be an added worry, in having to find the money for a regular sight test."

This contradicts some of the points made by my hon. Friends, but Mr. Payne also says that, like many people, he does not like the means test, but:

> "May I add that I am not afraid of any means test as considering the number of forms I have filled in for the DHSS/Rates/Tax Office etc., I am sure most of my personal affairs are on various computers already."

It may be that he and his wife will, because of their ages, benefit from today's announcement, and that will be fine. However, they will not get back the money they have already forfeited, because losing their 41p supplementary benefit cost them a fortune in general and water rates. Judging from today's comments by the Secretary of State, they will be worse off in October 1989 than they are today. That is a measure of the extra £200 million that the Chancellor has made available.

The Queen's Speech referred to a strengthening of the National Health Service. That comes from the same Government who managed to turn a £1 billion pay increase for nurses into an utter fiasco. We are told that nurses should stop complaining and shut up because they have been given a 17 per cent. pay increase. However, all right hon. and hon. Members know that average percentage figures can be grossly misleading.

In the west midlands region, 42 per cent. of ward sisters received a 4 per cent. increase; 33 per cent. of staff nurses received 4 per cent.; 47 per cent. of state enrolled nurses have been given 4 per cent.; and 90 per cent. of auxiliaries also received 4 per cent. Last week I visited the intensive care unit of Birmingham children's hospital together with my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) and for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis). We were given the example of six grade C enrolled nurses receiving pay increases of 7·1 per cent. and three grade D state enrolled nurses receiving 28·4 per cent. The average for that group of nine people is 14·2 per cent., but two thirds of them received only a 7·1 per cent. increase. That proves how grossly misleading averages can be. It is part of the reason why nurses are so damned angry.

The intensive care unit of Birmingham children's hospital is a sensitive issue. Last winter journalists were queuing outside its doors and the staff there are reluctant to talk to the media because they know that anything they say can be twisted out of all proportion. The Central Birmingham health authority managers have told the press and all the world that 50 per cent. of the unit's 49 staff are receiving pay increases of between £2,100 and £3,100. What about the other 50 per cent? Averages can be misleading.

Last week my two hon. Friends and I met 13 of the unit's staff. I hasten to add, for the benefit of the Fleet street scumbags, that we met those nurses when they were off duty, in their own time. I say that because two weeks ago the Fleet street mongrels were at the hospital only to look for information that could be used to attack the nurses there. Those nurses, including several in membership of the Royal College of Nursing, tried working to the grades allocated by the Government. Five sisters, six staff nurses and two enrolled nurses gave us example after example of the differences between them. I shall not detail them all because to do so might be unfair. However, of the 12 sisters in the unit, five have been placed in grade F and seven in grade G.

Two of the nursing sisters were of the same age, had the same skills, received the same training, and were in the same job. They are also members of the same team, because there are only six beds in the unit and the nursing staff operate as a team looking after a maximum of two patients. The only difference between them is six months' service as nursing sisters. They have both served for several years as nurses, but one has been a sister six months longer than the other. On that basis, one was graded F and the other G. Prior to the change, sisters on the top rate had a salary of £12,000. Now a grade F sister receives £12,500, which is an increase of only 4·2 per cent., while one graded G receives £13,925, which is a rise of almost £2,000, or 16 per cent.

Working to grade in that intensive care unit will not work. Other health authorities in the west midlands region are telephoning members of the intensive care unit's 49 staff offering higher grades if they will move authorities. They are headhunting. This time last year, one hon. Member after another representing west midlands constituencies pressed for emergency debates under Standing Order No. 20 because children needing urgent operations were being turned away. That was when only three of the intensive care unit's beds were being used and there was surplus capacity. We were told that there were not enough nurses and that the Government were doing something about the situation.

It is true that extra training has begun, but what will happen now with all the discontent about the dividing of salaries and splitting of grades, and with other health authorities headhunting? The situation is absolutely crazy. Nursing staff are leaving the unit because, although they want to work there, they also want to be nurses—and can serve adjoining health authorities equally well for an extra £2,000 per year. An increase of that sort is not to be sniffed at, because, like the rest of the population, they have mortgages to pay. It is grossly unfair to put them in that situation.

It is even more unfair that, when those nurses tried working for a couple of days to the Government's allocated grades, they were pilloried by their own management, resulting in headlines such as

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

"Action hits child heart operations",

and

"Admissions halted as nurses work to rule".

The Press even telephoned some nurses and asked, "When you work to grade, will there be pickets?" That is the kind of pressure that those nurses were under.

The fact remains that not one patient in Birmingham children's hospital failed to receive an operation as a result of the nurses there working to grade for two days. That is contrary to what was said by management—they told lies. At all times, all six beds in the intensive care unit were occupied, and the unit could not have accommodated another child from the operating theatre, so no further operations could have taken place anyway. Every bed in the unit was already occupied. It was grossly unfair to put around stories that, because nurses were working to grades allocated by the Government and dividing their responsibilities, they caused young children to miss vital operations. That is not true.

The situation appears even more obscene when one recalls that a year ago parents of children desperately needing operations at Birmingham children's hospital attempted to make the courts order the Government to use their resources in ensuring operations for their children. By and large, the courts threw out those applications, saying, "It is nothing to do with us—we don't want to know." Today, Ministers of the Crown, aided and abetted by management, are actively encouraging health authorities to take nurses to court. That is obscene when one remembers that, a year ago, parents could not get any redress in the courts, but now Ministers are telling health authorities that they should take their nurses to court for breaking their contracts. That is a sad state of affairs. I hope that Ministers will in their quieter moments reflect on why it is that, having paid an extra £1 billion into the Health Service, which I do not deny, they have created the fiasco that they have.

I turn to two aspects of the Prime Minister's speech on Tuesday—the one that she made in this House, not that read out by Her Majesty the Queen in another place. In the first few minutes of her speech, the Prime Minister clearly showed that she had no idea what my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition meant when he attacked the Government for their centralisation and dictatorship. She did not have a clue what he was on about. That worries me, because the Prime Minister's shallowness is a danger to us all.

Mr. Hayward: My right hon. Friend is not shallow.

Mr. Rooker: She is extremely shallow. Her response to my right hon. Friend's remarks shows that to be true. It is because she has been surrounded by yes-men over the years.

One has only to look at the Prime Minister's rebuttal in columns 20 and 21 of *Hansard*. If hon. Members want to defend the Prime Minister, that is fine, but to make everybody a shareholder and a home owner is not freedom when shareholders and home owners are not allowed to read books published overseas about their own country. It is not freedom to take less tax if at the same time the burden of taxation is shifted from the well-off to the less well-off—as will happen with the poll tax. It is not freedom for parents to have choice over education and then to prevent them and their children from seeing the history of their own country on television simply because some of the participants, dead or alive, are now non-persons. It is not freedom either to talk—as the Prime Minister did—about giving people independence and then to remove the right of a public interest defence from those people of independent mind who put loyalty to the state above loyalty to the Government, who might not always be telling the truth in order to avoid political embarrassment.

The shallowness of the Prime Minister's simple equation is, "You've got shares, so you're free". It is not like that. People are asking many questions about the nature of the society in which they live and why certain avenues of dissent are closed to them—the very points that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition put to the Prime Minister. These are serious issues, but the Prime Minister treated them in a shallow way. She ignored these points—not, unfortunately, at her peril but at ours. We, as Members of Parliament, and our constituents will suffer from this approach to Government.

My second point concerning the Prime Minister relates to her use of terrorism for scoring party political points. She does it all the time. The Prime Minister, her family and her colleagues, as well as some of my colleagues, have been and are now under terrorist threat. I, like every other hon. Member, bear the Prime Minister no personal ill will, but that does not prevent me from legitimately criticising the way in which she seeks to use terrorism for party political purposes.

It was not a Labour Government who, when it was convenient, put a terrorist on a plane in the early 1970s to get her out of this country so that the Government did not have to face the consequences. That was a Government in which the Prime Minister was a member of the Cabinet. It was not a Labour Government who knowingly allowed the killer of a police officer to leave this country and go free. That was done by this Government. Yet the Prime Minister never misses an opportunity to taunt and to taint Her Majesty's loyal Opposition by saying that they are soft on or, by implication, support terrorism. She tops the league when it comes to people rushing to get into black, especially when there is a camera about. That is usually after some of her own laws have failed, whether they concern acts of terrorism or shipping safety.

The Prime Minister said to us on Tuesday, as she has said before, that if hon. Members do not vote for her Bill they do not share the Government's determination to fight terrorism. She is seeking to obtain a crude party political advantage when we should combine as a nation to fight terrorism. We have heard today that in the early hours of this morning there was another tragedy in County Tyrone when an elderly man and his grand-daughter were killed. Those murders would not have been prevented by the Prime Minister's laws against terrorism, but they might have been prevented if there were more bobbies on the beat. That tragedy occurred a few days after the Chief Constable in Northern Ireland said that there are to be fewer policemen on the beat in Northern Ireland because money is short. That is the reality of fighting terrorism. The Prime Minister should not seek to make cheap party political points about terrorism.

In 1943, the Prime Minister, as she was perfectly entitled to do, went to Oxford. If I were in her shoes, I should be slow to condemn and smear Labour supporters who voluntarily donned military or Land Army uniforms or factory overalls before they were required to do so in order to fight Hitler. Many of them lied about their age so that they could get into that fight. Those people now question the validity of the Prime Minister's methods and laws to fight terrorism. They see, year after year, that the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974—which I admit I have never voted against—does not stop terrorism. They deeply resent their loyalty and patriotism being called into question by this Prime Minister. She knows that she is in no position to do it and she should stop it.

6.55 pm

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): Before I comment on the Gracious Speech, I want to make a few observations about the latter comments of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). When he reads his comments, I hope that he will regret having made some of them. He referred to the shallowness of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I think that he meant to use a different word. He may disagree with my right hon. Friend about many political issues. I respect him for having disagreed with his own party on previous occasions about a number of issues. He knows how to stick to his guns and to put forward his own point of view. However, his comments about my right hon. Friend—her shallowness and, both specifically and by innuendo, the proposals for Northern Ireland—were utterly reprehensible and in the cold light of day they will be seen to be indefensible. There may be a difference of opinion, but some of the hon. Gentleman's comments were utterly unacceptable to most hon. Members.

I pay tribute—it may seem a little late, but for personal reasons I wish to do so—to my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) for having moved the motion on the Loyal Address. For a period I served as his parliamentary private secretary. He displayed in the Chamber on Tuesday the wit, charm and good humour that he displayed to me as his PPS and to his civil servants in all the Departments in which he served, which he so wittily identified during his speech.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) made a series of accusations about the unemployment statistics. They are well-used accusations. However, in a debate on the economic situation in 1987, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) challenged the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). He asked:

> "Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the Shadow Chancellor's statement that, if the Labour party came to power, it would make no change in the way in which unemployment statistics are collated?"

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East replied:

> "I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me a chance to make that absolutely clear. We have made clear that our job contribution will be on the registered figures. We have no desire to change them."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1987; Vol. 112, c. 1072.]

Will Opposition Members therefore please stop whingeing about the re-calculation of the figures? All their leading spokesmen have confirmed that the Opposition do not intend to change the basis of the calculation.

The Gracious Speech refers to employment in simple terms. It says:

> "A Bill will be introduced to remove unnecessary obstacles to employment, particularly in relation to women and young people, and to alter training arrangements."

I understand that one of the proposals relates to practices connected with discrimination against women: I hope so. In what I believe to be a quotation from a press release, the *Financial Times* says:

> "The anti-bias requirements of the Sex Discrimination Act 1967 will override all other legislation."

Many of my constituents hope that that will apply to, for example, pensions for those employed in education. At present, if a male head teacher dies, his wife—if she survives him—is entitled to half the pension. If a female head teacher dies, her husband is not entitled to any pension unless a substantial extra contribution is made.

I cannot understand why, in this day and age, when both individuals could potentially have made equal contributions throughout their time in the profession—whether as ordinary teachers, heads of department or head teachers—a female head teacher should be asked, as one of my constituents has been, to pay more than £5,000 extra so that her husband can receive what she would receive if her husband died. That is utterly illogical and I hope that one of the Government's intentions is to remedy it, although I have a sneaking suspicion that it is not.

I welcome the announcements made this afternoon about improvements in pension arrangements. I was fortunate enough to be able to intervene in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on this subject. I have expressed concern previously about people marginally above the income support and supplementary benefit levels who are being penalised in many different ways. We do not know the full details yet, but my right hon. Friend's recognition of the problem is a clear indication of its existence. I hope that the House also welcomes this announcement, and that it shows the Government's intention. I am, however, disappointed that so few Opposition Members have even had the grace to welcome the substantial extra payments made not only to those people but to the most elderly pensioners.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), if I heard him aright—unfortunately he is not here now, but we can check *Hansard*—said categorically that, immediately on the return of a Labour Government, he would reintroduce the earnings link. The hon. Gentleman accepted that that would cost £5·5 billion. If that is so—the figure was his—we have started early in this Parliament. In the last Parliament the Opposition did not start making promises until 18 months or two years before the general election, but this afternoon we have had promises not only from the hon. Member for Livingston but from the hon. Member for Newham, North-East, who proposed that we put another £180 million into employment training.

That, of course, was a contribution from the Back Benches. But I presume that the £5·5 billion mentioned by the hon. Member for Livingston would take precedence over the £2 billion for the NHS, the extra money for the nurses pleaded for by the hon. Member for Perry Barr and the extra money for overseas aid, rate support grant, transport infrastructure, heating allowances, housing and child benefit or television licences. If the Labour party is to make such promises so early in the Parliament, surely we can reasonably expect some prioritisation. We need to know whether those commitments will all be included in the first Budget or will be introduced at later stages.

It is dishonest for each Labour spokesman to make policy on his feet and to promise huge sums of money in this fashion. After all, £5·5 billion is 2·5 times the tax cuts that the Government introduced in the last Budget. The hon. Members for Livingston and Newham, North-East must find the money from somewhere, and they ought to have the courage to say where it will come from.

[Mr. Robert Hayward]

I said that I wanted to deal primarily with employment, availability tests and employment training. The taxes and prices index issued by the Department and introduced by the present Government is, I feel, unnecessary. While it may show what someone needs to maintain his income of the previous year, it should surely be argued that people should be paid in terms of their productivity and their contribution to the company concerned—and what the company can therefore afford. That is measured by neither the taxes and prices index nor the retail prices index. If, as many of my collegues argue—rightly, in my view—wages and salaries should be paid on the basis of what a company can afford, the taxes and prices index performs no useful task and should be done away with.

We already have fairly rigorous employment availability tests, but I support further progress in ensuring that only those who are genuinely unemployed and seeking work receive benefit. A fair number of people are not now in that position. The Government estimate 3 per cent. unemployment as full employment: rather higher than the previous estimate, and if the south and west are anything to go by, the figure may be even higher. But any employer in the west country will say that he is having difficulty in recruiting trainees of all ages, regardless of salary or the nature of the jobs involved.

Astoundingly, Avon and Somerset police have recently had to increase the minimum age at which they are willing to recruit because they cannot get people into the police force, yet the unemployment figure in Bristol is certainly nowhere near 3 per cent. It is substantially higher in the constituency of the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) than in mine. But there is no suggestion that all those who are supposed to be available for work are so available.

Ms. Primarolo: It is true that in Bristol there are problems of recruitment in certain sectors of industry. That is not for the want of unemployed people applying for the jobs. As in the south of England, there is a mismatch between the skills of the unemployed and those that the employers are seeking. That is another indictment of the Government's failed training schemes. Bristol employers are looking for highly trained staff. The Government's employment training projects teach people to type, clean or fill supermarket shelves, which is not what is required in Bristol's hi-tech industries. The problem is not that no one is looking for work.

Mr. Hayward: I was going to come on to that point. I do not agree with the hon. Lady about whose responsibility it is.

We are putting large sums into employment training. There may be some criticisms of the scheme. Before I came to the House I was a personnel manager and worked with a series of Government schemes under both the present Government and a Labour Government. Government-sponsored training schemes have for the most part improved, but I am worried about the amount of money that they spend on employment training as such. Training is the responsibility of companies, not of the Government.

I was disappointed to hear the hon. Member for Newham, North-East repeatedly say what the Government could do. One of the problems is that for decades, with the exception of some large companies, companies have not generally perceived the need for apprenticeships or training schemes. British management's attitude has for many decades been that, once somebody is 21, he is trained for life. There has been no attempt to train employees to a higher standard.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The hon. Gentleman said that he supports availability testing and a strengthening of it. In September, one of my constituents had his benefit stopped because, when asked what wage he sought, he replied £80 a week. I do not think that £80 a week is unreasonable, even in a low wage area such as Burnley. Does the hon. Gentleman support that withdrawal of benefit? Perhaps I can avoid being accused of not putting the case in perspective by saying that that man is now in work, although his appeal has still to be heard. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that benefit should be stopped in such circumstances?

Mr. Hayward: I am willing to consider the case, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister is, but I cannot comment as I have so few details. Nor is it for me to make such a decision. I could cite cases that arose in the 1970s and ask the hon. Gentleman to tell me what he thinks, but he would be right to say that he could not comment.

We must encourage management to train more. When management has identified skills shortages, it ought to cast around within the company to see whether it is possible to train existing employees with basic skills to improve the quality of the work force. Such training should be done at the company's expense. Management should not expect the state to train people. Such an expectation gets it nowhere. The average foreman on the shop floor in German industry is expected to have attained a high academic standard and to be a problem-solver. British managers never expect that. Management does not train people to that standard, so why should they perform such functions? There must be a change of attitude in British management. Without it, we will be left behind.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The hon. Gentleman is describing exactly what happened before 1979, when firms trained their own personnel. The hon. Gentleman may disagree, but I was an industrial relations manager with what is now British Coal. We worked seven years ahead with apprenticeships and the training scheme and expected to lose people to other industries but also to gain them. People moved between the coal, steel, engineering and glass industries which used to be in my constituency. What has happened since 1979?

Mr. Hayward: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says about training, but even in 1979 it was nowhere near adequate. Like him, I was responsible for a training school. We must consider what we turned out. I had long discussions about changing apprenticeship schemes with trade union officials, but they regarded schemes as immutable and sacrosanct. When we talked about introducing some form of technician grade so that people could be trained to the same level as a French or German person with similar academic qualifications, the trade unions said no way.

We must train people under 21, but we must also train them after they are 21. Unfortunately, the majority of industries have not trained people after they are 21. That makes a dramatic contribution to today's skills shortages.

Employers are quite prepared to go outside the company and to pay more to get the necessary skills, but they are unwilling to consider paying an existing employee to be trained. That is a failing of British management. Industry has the profits necessary to afford such training. Indeed, I hope that even in unprofitable circumstances training will continue. It is all too easy to cut training during a period of relative recession.

There are a few other matters on which I had hoped to speak, but I have taken some of the House's time and I do not think that it would be fair to speak for much longer. The proposals in the Gracious Speech are worth while. Long-term employment will continue to grow and unemployment will continue to fall, despite what Opposition Members say. I support my right hon. Friend's proposals which are to be brought forward this year.

7.15 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward), as he has always shown a deep interest in training. The House is always better informed after listening to him on employment and training matters.

The hon. Gentleman issued a challenge to Opposition Members and said that we were unwilling to welcome the Secretary of State's announcement about additional help for older pensioners. I am perfectly prepared to welcome it. It is not a significant step in terms of the money involved and much more needs to be done, but it would be churlish not to recognise that older pensioners are most in need and that their plight is recognised by the Secretary of State's announcement.

I tried to read the Queen's Speech from the point of view of a pensioner. I wanted to see whether pensioners can derive any hope of improved income in the next 12 months as a result of the proposed measures. Experts now predict that inflation will run at 7 per cent. for the foreseeable future. The proposed privatisation of water and electricity will lead to the expectation that charges for those utilities will rise. It is also widely expected that council rents will increase as a result of the Government's proposals for changing housing and local government finance. My overall impression is that pensioners will face higher charges.

In view of the farcical imposition of charges for dental and eye tests for retired people, pensioners are right to be worried about the drift of the Government's thinking. We must also remember the effect of the changes that were made to housing benefit in the spring as a result of the Social Security Act 1986. I had the dubious honour of serving on the Standing Committee which considered that Bill. Those of us on that Standing Committee warned the then Secretary of State for Social Services about the problems that are now emerging and being raised by my constituents in my surgeries, and no doubt in those of other hon. Members. If anything, the problems have occurred more quickly than I expected.

Pensioners look forward with no enthusiasm to the imminent imposition of a minimum 20 per cent. contribution towards poll tax and water rates in Scotland. The Secretary of State's announcement about the increase of £200 million for pensioners says much about the Government's agenda for the future evolution of the social security system. Taken together with the other changes that I mentioned, there is now a real worry that the Government are deliberately and unashamedly moving away from the universal welfare state that the country has enjoyed since the days of Beveridge. There may be an argument about that, and I am prepared to join in it. A successful and forceful argument can be made for maintaining and improving universal benefits.

It is unacceptable for the Government, by stealth, to dismantle major pillars of the welfare state that we have enjoyed to date. There is a worry that they are doing so. A system that moves towards selectivity would inevitably cost more. The Government know that it costs £3·20 to administer £100-worth of housing benefit and only £1·40 to pay £100-worth of pensions. The Government are right to try to reduce administrative costs, but moving towards selectivity will cost substantially more in the future.

The Secretary of State mentioned the rate of take-up of benefits. We know from historical figures that housing benefit has a take-up rate of only 77 per cent. The take-up rate for the recently introduced family credit system is only about 40 per cent. I heard what the Secretary of State said about introducing campaigns to increase the level of take-up, and I support that move because it is necessary. However, it will never serve senior citizens as well as they would be served by a system based more on universal payment of welfare. Savings are inevitably penalised when a selective system is used. I was pleased that the hon. Member for Kingswood was worried about that. Like him, I shall be looking carefully at the detail of the announcement made earlier to see whether people who are marginally above the income support level will derive any substantial benefit from the changes. I suspect that they will not, because that is a difficult end to achieve administratively.

If one is arguing about a selective system versus a universal system, one cannot avoid bringing into the equation the fact that there are very many universal tax breaks. Tax allowances, by definition, are universal. For example, there is the famous mortgage interest tax relief and other allowances. One cannot argue for a selective benefit system and then accept, willy-nilly, universal tax allowances. There should be an open and fair-minded discussion about the evolution of the Government's thinking on social security. I used to study these matters carefully, and I am again responsible for dealing with social security for the Social and Liberal Democratic party. I shall be looking carefully at all the pointers in future to see whether the Government are, by default, bringing about sea changes in the running of the social security system.

There is great difficulty with the statistics that bedevil the whole argument. I receive a clandestine copy of the Members' brief produced by Conservative Central Office. There is a mole there, but I will not tell the House who it is. The brief contains statements such as:

> "Pensioners have benefited from an economy revitalised by Conservative policies: Since 1979 the Conservatives have increased spending on the elderly by 27 per cent. in real terms."

That statement is phrased in a way that can be defended statistically. However, it is equally true that since November 1978 the increase in the value of the pensions in relation to prices has been 1·4 per cent. That is not a massive increase. The brief goes on:

> "Fully 50 per cent. of the current social security budget now goes on spending on the elderly."

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

That is also statistically true, but most of that expenditure is covered by the cost of contributory benefits paid for by the national insurance contribution scheme.

Among other things, the brief says:

> "This Government has more than maintained the real value of the state retirement pension."

Again, taken at face value, that statement is also true. However, in November 1978, the value of pensions was 20·4 per cent. of gross male earnings. In April 1989, assuming a rise in inflation of about 7 per cent., that 20·4 per cent. will fall to 16·2 per cent. of gross male earnings.

It is interesting that we are now using different indices for costs and for pension upratings. A 5·9 per cent. uprating is due to take effect in April next year. As I have said, prices are, however, now expected to rise by about 7 per cent. in that time and average earnings will increase by 9·25 per cent. There are different ways of looking at the statistics and if we bandy them about we must bandy them about with great care if we are to cast any real light on what is actually happening.

According to Age Concern, by April 1989, assuming inflation rises by about 7 per cent. between now and April next year, a single pensioner will be £10 per week worse off because of the delinking in 1982 of pensions from prices or earnings, whichever was the greater.

Like the hon. Member for Kingswood, I do not think that it is sensible to argue that it is possible to spend immediately £5·5 billion to bring that link back on stream. It would waste resources and drive a coach and horses through the rest of the economy. We do have to remember that we must create wealth in order to redistribute it. However, the hon. Member for Kingswood must accept that the continuous erosion in the level of pension increases compared with the level of earnings increases means that, year after year, pensioners are falling further behind the general wealth enjoyed by the community.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): The hon. Gentleman is making some interesting points. Does he acknowledge that the previous Labour Government, who had a policy of increasing pensions in line with prices or earnings, whichever was the greater, broke that pledge in 1976 and 1978? Was not the Liberal party involved in the Lib-Lab pact in 1978?

Mr. Kirkwood: I was still in short trousers in 1978. Therefore, I shall treat that intervention with the contempt it deserves.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I was not in short trousers in 1978 but what I recall may help the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) who, like many of his colleagues, does not understand the issue. Whatever the shortcomings of the previous Labour Government, which I would not wish to cloud, during that Government's period in office, the basic pension increased by 20 per cent. in real terms. That is the pension received by the majority of pensioners and that is most important to the poorest pensioners. Under this Government, it has increased by 2 per cent. in eight years. That is a shocking and disgraceful record.

Mr. Kirkwood: I feel like the piggy in the middle of this argument. The last Labour Government had nothing to do with me, nor have the Government's present proposals. I am trying to pick my way sensibly and rationally through this minefield as best I can.

Average figures used in the statistics mask the poverty of the lower 60 per cent. of pensioners, especially those over 75 years of age. Age Concern and the other pressure groups and agencies have demonstrated the extent of that poverty to the satisfaction of any objective person.

I should like to say a word or two about another group of disadvantaged people in the social security system. This is familiar territory for me because I raised the matter in the Standing Committee that dealt with the Social Security Act 1986. In discussions about those who have lost as a result of the social security changes made in April, one group has received little publicity but deserves attention and support—widows aged under 45. They have been treated scandalously by the Government. During debates on the Social Security Act 1986 the Government said that no existing widow would lose the benefit she is currently receiving. Most of those affected are widows who lost their husbands before 11 April 1988, but whose widow's allowance ran out after that time. Most of them thought that they would be dealt with under the old rules, but I discovered to my horror—I fully understand why they are most upset—that the cut-off date was October 1987. This change has left many widows distressed and they have experienced a substantial loss in expected income. According to Government estimates, 14,000 widows are affected.

The raising of the age limit and the abolition of the personal extension to widowed mother's allowance means that thousands of widows aged between 40 and 55 are experiencing severe hardship. I cannot accept that Ministers believe that the sums saved can justify the anxiety that has been caused. Transitional payments have been offered to other categories in the social security system, so I ask the Minister to review this matter and to consider restoring widows, lost income.

Ministers previously promised to review the widow's payment of £1,000. The level of the payment was set in 1985, prior to its implementation in April 1988. Where is the review? Is it being carried out now, and is there not a strong case for increasing the payment?

The Gracious Speech missed an opportunity to help elderly people. In 1986, the then Secretary of State was warned that the proposed changes would cause much hardship. I welcome the additional £200 million for older and disabled pensioners who are experiencing the worst hardship, but I wish that the Government would listen more to what pensioners are telling hon. Members at their clinics. That group of people, not a minority, desperately need help. I have looked in vain for help in the legislation promulgated in the Gracious Speech.

7.33 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on the interesting subject of pensions, although I shall refer to it later. In 1979, the hon. Gentleman was 33 years old, so heaven knows what he was doing posturing in short trousers.

In view of what the hon. Gentleman has just said about widows, I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) said yesterday about early-day motion 1237 of the previous Session:

> "That this House recognises the unfair treatment of the war widows and widows of Servicemen who retired before 31st March 1973".

It also dealt with other categories of widows. I hope that in this Session there will be some amelioration of their plight.

I welcome the reference in the Gracious Speech to housing and home improvement grants. I especially welcome the report—which I hope is reliable—in *The Times* of Monday last. The headline reads:

> "Low-cost homes to help villagers left behind by the boom."

The report suggests that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my noble Friend the Minister for Housing, Environment and Countryside are proposing measures to assist the building of 40,000 homes in rural areas to help young villagers priced out of their communities by soaring property costs. The report says:

> "It is understood that ministers will impose restrictions on the future sale of the low-cost homes to keep them available for local people."

If the report accurately reflects the Government's intentions, I shall welcome them vigorously. I do not want to develop the subject, because I have spoken on it before. It was the subject of my maiden speech a year ago, and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may have noticed an article written by me in *The House Magazine* this week which deals substantially with it. I am extremely grateful to the editors of the *The House Magazine* for giving me that opportunity.

I should like to make a further preliminary point that is appropriate in view of the regrettable remarks of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) about the Prime Minister and terrorism. I welcome the passage in the Gracious Speech dealing with Northern Ireland and strongly support the proposed measures. Conservative Members welcome the remarks made yesterday by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) about Northern Ireland and terrorism. We welcome the support that he gave to those measures. I think I am right in saying that he is the only leader of an Opposition party outside Northern Ireland to support those measures, and Conservative Members are grateful for that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) had the courage yesterday to make a controversial speech on Northern Ireland. I should like to place on record the fact that we need to consider and discuss measures, such as those that he proposed, of last resort—I emphasise that they would be measures of last resort—as a counter to the unholy alliance that exists in pubs, clubs and drawing rooms of defeatists and secret Republicans who are bent on scuttle. Scuttle, as the Prime Minister told me during Prime Minister's Question Time three weeks ago, would be grievously detrimental to the lives of thousands of people in Northern Ireland. It would grievously threaten the unity and morale of this kingdom.

While keeping under consideration the rather drastic proposals suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington, we must continue to batten down the hatches and soldier on, resolving that scuttle is unthinkable. We owe that to the people of Northern Ireland, the families of service men and policemen who have been killed and maimed, and, not least, to the memory of our former colleague, who was my friend and mentor for over 20 years and who died in hospital in my constituency, Sir John Biggs-Davison.

I entirely support and understand the economic policy set out in the Gracious Speech and the indication of prudence regarding reductions in taxation. The 1988 Budget has, however, created certain expectations about tax reductions, especially among those on or around average earnings who did not benefit substantially from the budgetary measures as a whole.

I refer my hon. Friends to a written answer that I obtained on 20 October 1988, at column *989* of *Hansard.* It shows where we stand now compared with the past 25 years. All Conservative Members recognise, and our opponents do not deny, the substantial gains that have been made in reducing taxation in recent years. I asked the Treasury for the proportion of gross income represented by the amount of income tax and employees' national insurance contributions payable on certain incomes at certain dates. For a married couple on average earnings the deduction was 26 per cent. in 1988-89, which was an improvement on 1983-84, when the deduction was 29·6 per cent. It was still slightly worse than the position in the last year of the Government led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), when it was 25·6 per cent., and it was much more than the figure in the last year of the so-called 13 years, 1963-64, when it was 17·6 per cent.

The pattern repeated itself in the figures for incomes of half average earnings—17·9 per cent. in 1988-89, which was down from 20·1 per cent. in 1983-84, marginally up on 1973-74, when it was 16·2 per cent. and substantially up on 1963-64, when it was only 7·6 per cent. Absolute living standards at both levels have improved considerably over that period. The figures show the objectives that we need to pursue in this and subsequent Sessions.

I want to speak about pensions, but I do not wish to pull two ways at once. I have pressed for continued pressure to reduce taxation. All Conservative Members would want to do what they can for our pensioners, especially those in greatest need. Economic success will enable us to do that. Economic success has accompanied our policies, at least since 1982, and, despite our various concerns, I believe that it will continue to do so.

I greatly welcome today's announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and I do not think that he could have improved his timing. My mailbag in recent weeks has revealed the considerable worries among pensioners about a number of matters, including the introduction of eye test charges for pensioners or retired people. Several of my hon. Friends and I tried to avert that measure and were narrowly unsuccessful. Certain other factors have contributed to people's worries.

I should like to quote from a typical letter from an old lady about her plight, which she sets out reasonably. She says that she paid extra in graduated contributions and in working an extra year and that she felt that she had been penalised for what she did to better herself. She said:

> "in the main we are a generation which has given far more than it has taken and has considered self-reliance and duty to the community at large before any thought of what we can get for ourselves . . . I am a life-long Conservative and have given a lot of time for working for the party in younger days".

She goes on to describe how she is disturbed about what is happening. I am sure that she will welcome, as I do on

[Mr. David Nicholson]

her behalf, the measures announced today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. They will be valuable and helpful, and we want to build on them.

Before knowing that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was to make an announcement, I asked the Library to chase up for me a reference in a weekend newspaper. The Library provided me with the figures on gross weekly incomes of households whose head had retired. Those figures from the 1986 family expenditure survey showed that nearly 30 per cent. of such households had incomes of less than £60 a week and that almost 20 per cent.—bringing the total to half the number of households —had incomes of between £60 and £80 a week. I would not consider such people wealthy. Ministers must be careful when talking about wealthy pensioners when proposing measures.

I, too, have the document that was leaked to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. I do not know whether the same mole sent it to me as sent it to him. If any Opposition Members wish to argue about the figures, no doubt Ministers will respond, but I believe that they have been carefully researched. Between 1979 and 1986, pensioners' average incomes from savings rose by more than 7 per cent. a year in real terms. We must take account also of the income that pensioners have from other sources, including occupational pensions. Pensioners' average real incomes increased by 23 per cent. between 1979 and 1986, compared with 3 per cent. under Labour.

I take the point made by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. Most of the figures that show a happy state of affairs reflect proportional increases. I have spoken of the plight of many pensioners. My constituency and other West Country constituencies include a number of such people, who worked as farm labourers, or worked in retail industry, in public services or in public administration. In the 1950s and 1960s, those people did not work in what passed for the higher paid manufacturing industry, which has since suffered substantial job losses.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick Nicholls) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Nicholson: I am glad to see my hon. Friend, whose constituency is not a million miles from mine, nodding in agreement. One needs only an elementary sense of logic to deduce that, if the proportionate improvement has been significant over the past seven years, and if there are still aspects of privation, the position when the Conservatives came to power must have been squalid. We have had a small interchange across the Floor of the Chamber about what the Labour Government achieved, or did not achieve. I shall relate it for the benefit of the House. In 1975 and 1976, Labour withheld the Christmas bonus. The Labour Government failed dismally——

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): We all have the brief.

Mr. Nicholson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will read, mark and inwardly digest it. There is substantial hypocrisy on the Opposition side—I refer principally to the Labour party, as the Liberal party was responsible for these matters for such a short period.

Mr. Flynn: We have all listened with great care to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Does he agree that the great divide between rich and poor in society has also occurred among pensioners, and that by giving average figures he ignores the plight of the millions who rely on basic pensions? Under the Labour Government, the basic pension increased by 20 per cent. in real terms. Under the Conservatives it has increased by only 2·1 per cent.

As for the timing, it is disingenuous to suggest that today's announcement is anything other than what will be known in the future as "Nigel's embarrassment bonus", stemming not from any desire to please pensioners or to achieve justice, but from the need to save the Treasury embarrassment. Had it been part of any plan or act of compassion, we should have heard about it three weeks ago in the uprating statement.

Mr. Nicholson: That was quite a lengthy intervention. I am sure that the respective Front Benches can thrash out the figures. I believe that those given by the hon. Gentleman have been challenged. If anyone wishes to challenge those that I have given, I shall be happy to hear from him.

I conclude by referring to a subject that is dealt with in considerably more detail than usual in the Gracious Speech—international relations, especially East-West relations. I believe that the various other measures and policies that the Government intend to pursue will be beggared by far by the great issue of East-West relations and the magnificent opportunity that awaits us and the people of eastern Europe. I shall not enlarge on the subject, but I commend to the House the wise words of my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen), my next-door neighbour and former Whip, who was speaking, I believe, for the first time in 15 years in the House. My hon. Friend created the note on which I end my contribution to this year's debate on the Gracious Speech.

7.52 pm

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I have a feeling of déjà vu today, as I recall that when the Government were under pressure from both sides of the House about their cuts in housing benefit, they produced out of the hat the so-called £2·50 rule with transitional protection. We were told that no one would be more than £2·50 a week worse off, and we were challenged to welcome that change and not to be churlish about it. As time has gone on, however, the transitional protection has turned out to be rather less than that. For some people it amounted to 1p per week. For one constituent of mine it was just 98p and for another it was 44p per week. I will welcome today's statement by the Secretary of State only if it turns out to mean exactly what he says it does. If it turns out to be a case, to use his own words, of empty rhetoric and bogus promises—as the £2·50 promise in April was—we shall point out that it is the Government who make bogus promises and when under pressure appear to produce money which they claim not to have in the first place.

I wish to devote the main part of my speech to the effect of social security changes on the welfare state. It has been suggested today that substantial changes may be occurring in the basic nature of the universal welfare state. That is absolutely true. The Government are changing the nature of the welfare state not by stealth but by direct attack, and they are targeting not the needs of poor people but the poor people themselves. The Government are picking off poor people and denying them the right to support under the welfare state.

The Secretary of State made the astonishing claim that nearly seven months was not long enough to assess the changes in the social security system introduced in April, and that we should have to see how it settled down. I disagree entirely. In south Bristol, we have carried out a survey of the impact of the changes on people in that area in the last six and a half months. The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) said that unemployment was higher in Bristol, South than in Kingswood. The number of claimants is also much higher. As a city, Bristol has 31,000 claimant families, and more than 15,000 of them live in south Bristol. The benefit office covering my constituency is the largest in Bristol and the second largest in the south-west.

We took a leaf out of the book of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and decided to judge the DHSS on the targets that it had set for itself. The Department's criteria were that benefit should be targeted on those in greatest need, that the system should be simplified both administratively and for claimants, and that it should provide particular assistance for priority groups. Those were to be the central criteria of the social security system, and we decided to assess cases in south Bristol on the basis of those criteria.

I will give just a few examples of what has happened to the target groups in south Bristol under the Government's alleged policy. I begin with the caveat that I do not intend to read out all 15,000 cases. I will give just a few examples, which I hope the House will accept as representative, not because all the other cases are not fascinating and give the lie to the Government's position but because other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

The first example is that of an old-age pensioner couple, both of whom are registered handicapped. Their joint income as assessed by the DHSS was £97·30 a week, including occupational pension, which put them over the eligibility level for family credit. There were changes in the 20 per cent. payment for rates and rents and the removal of housing benefit for that so-called target group. Following those changes in April, they were £10·95 a week worse off—or, annually, their benefit was cut by £569·40.

My next example is of a single person, under the age of 25, working part-time. Because of changes in housing benefit, she was £14·52 a week worse off—an annual cut in benefit of £634·40. If people had pay rises of that amount, they would be grateful, yet some people have been subjected to cuts of that size.

Another of the so-called target groups is the single parent. I know a single parent with two dependants over the age of 18, one of whom is mentally handicapped. That family is now £281 a year worse off. All those people are in the so-called target groups. It must be an amazingly inefficient target system that misses every group that it claims to target.

There is the case of a divorced woman who works part time and is a home owner. She has tried to satisfy all the criteria, but because of the changes in housing benefit she will be £16 a week worse off. She heard about the transitional protection and applied for it. She was awarded 98p a week, leaving her £15·02 a week worse off, or £832 a year.

It is timely today to give an example of a student, given the problems of the students who tried to lobby Members of Parliament today to put forward their case about the attack on grants. The changes in housing benefit make an average student more than £300 a year worse off, despite the fact that students live on tiny incomes.

We considered only 30 cases of the many that arose in the target group and tried to work out how much the Government had clawed back from them. I am talking about money that this target group had before April, but did not have after the changes. From just 30 cases, the Government clawed back £8,900 a year. By far the most frequent and significant loss of income has occurred because of housing benefit changes and the requirement to pay 20 per cent. of rates and 100 per cent. of water rates, even for those on full benefit. In Bristol, South, on average, every claimant family is losing between £4 and £5 a week after deducting the so-called transitional protection payment.

The Government are stealing money from south Bristol. We asked claimants to tell us what they felt about the Government's actions. I shall cite just two examples. The first is of an old-age pensioner, living on her own, who had her purse stolen. She had no money and there was a week to go before her next pension payment. She went to the local DHSS office and asked for a grant. She was told that it was not an emergency and therefore did not come under the community care grant, but it offered her a loan. That lady had a total income of £44 a week, which must cover all her expenditure. In the end, she accepted the loan but was worried sick about how she would manage. That sort of hardship is how good the Government's targeting has proved to be.

My second example is of a single mother with five children. The youngest is seven and suffers from epilepsy. The mother applied for a grant for floor covering for the child's bedroom, but was told that it was not essential, even though there was danger to the child. The DHSS offered her a loan. Her total disposable income for a family of six—to include food, electricity and clothing, but excluding rent and rates—was £44·02 a week. The loan had to be repaid at £4·02 a week, and the last payment is due on 19 December.

Unfortunately, the family cooker broke down because it was archaic and needed repair. The mother asked the DHSS for a community care grant, but it said that a cooker was not essential and that the family should eat salads and sandwiches. It said that the criteria for what was essential had been changed. It would not give her a loan because it said that, having deducted the first loan from her benefit, she did not have sufficient to live on. It asked her to return on 19 December when the loan for the floor covering had been paid and would then consider a loan for the cooker. It expected that family to live on salads and sandwiches until that time.

Not only does the youngest child suffer from epilepsy, but he is hyperactive. Because of the type of food that the family were forced to eat, the child's health deteriorated. Surely that family was in the target group. How can anybody say anything other than that it is obscene for people to lose the basic rights to which they are entitled while this Government say time and again that the nation is wealthy and that they are creating even greater wealth?

The individual experience is most important, but we decided to widen the survey to protect ourselves against allegations of being selective. We contacted every advice agency in Bristol. During the time of the survey, those agencies had had contact with about 10,000 claimants—

[Ms. Dawn Primarolo]

one third of the claimants in Bristol. They could not find one claimant family who had gained. It could be argued that gainers would not go to an advice agency and say, "I don't want the extra money," but the fact is that a third of the claimants in Bristol were worse off, and those are the ones that we know about.

We then asked the organisations—I am happy to supply a list of them to any hon. Member who wants to see it—the magic four questions about the Government's claims. We asked first whether there had been more gainers or losers. According to all the advice agencies, there had been more losers. They had seen only people who had lost and, allowing for statistical error, they estimated that 88 per cent. of all those in receipt of benefit were worse off as a result of the changes.

The second question was whether the system of applying for benefits had become simpler for the claimants. Every agency said that it had become more difficult. The third question was whether the agencies thought that benefits were better targeted, and 100 per cent. of the agencies said that they were not. The fourth question, which is pertinent to the Secretary of State's announcement today about more advertising, was whether the Government's publicity had been effective in maximising the potential take-up of new benefits. Every agency said that the publicity had not been effective.

The overwhelming conclusion is that there has been an absolute failure in the system of welfare benefits, by the Government's criteria, let alone by anyone else's criteria. The agencies said that people needed to have an incredibly high reading age and had to be able to use complex language to fight their way through the forms—and had to have a few hours to spare. That is the opposite of what we were told when the Social Security Bill of 1988 was in Committee.

Which groups have benefited from the changes? It is not the young, who have been dropped out of the benefit system by the changes. It is not the pensioners, unless there is something magic about today's announcement, because they have not gained. Women, especially single parents, have not gained. Single parents comprise the vast majority of the claimant population and they have not gained, because of the freezing of child benefit, the changes in housing benefit and the abolition of free school meals and milk.

The ethnic minorities, including the black members of our community, have not gained from the changes. There are intimidating new questions on the form asking about years of residence, which frighten many people who believe that the Government are gathering information for more pernicious immigration legislation, for use in an identity card system or for policing the black community. Many of the forms are not translated into mother tongue languages to let people know about the benefits for which they can apply.

Families with children, the most sacred of all the target groups according to the Government, have not gained. I defy any hon. Member to keep an 11-year-old child on £11 a week, which is all the Government allow. My son will be 11 in January and, although I am not particularly extravagant, it costs a lot more than £11 a week to feed and clothe him. The disabled, who face particular problems, have not gained.

What has happened in Bristol, South? The Government have reduced spending there by removing the single payments system, and they have reduced our budgets by two thirds. Comparing the community care grants with the old single payments system, the money available to claimants in south Bristol has been reduced by 72 per cent. I do not care what statistics Ministers produce, and I do not care how the figures compare with what the Labour Government did or did not do in 1979. I am concerned about what is happening now to the people whom I represent. I am concerned about whether they are better or worse off compared to last year. The answer is that their position has not improved at all.

The Government have changed the social security system fundamentally. They have said that the social fund will replace the welfare state. They no longer have the idea of giving help to those in need. Rather than basing the social security system on need, they seek to turn the social security offices into a form of high street bank, which does not recognise people's needs but only their ability to pay back loans. They do not decide to give an emergency grant to a woman who needs a cooker. Instead, they ask whether she can afford a loan. That is a dramatic change in the social security system.

There have also been changes in housing benefit. In Bristol, £5·7 million has been cut from housing benefit as a result of the changes in April 1988. I do not know how the Government can have the audacity to tell us that they are finding ways to protect the weak and the vulnerable and that we should see the social security changes as a measure of their commitment to all. The Secretary of State said earlier that there was a sense of purpose and direction in the new social security legislation.

We interpret the legislation differently and believe that the Government's measurement of commitment to all is nil, because the poor will be assessed not on need but on ability to pay, and that the social security system is not viable as a welfare state system. The sense of purpose and direction is clear. The Government believe that people should live on charity and have no right to basic support through the state. The system does not help those in need even on the Government's own criteria, let alone on ours as Socialists.

It is a joke for the Government to say that they are finding ways to protect the weak and vulnerable. Why have we seen such massive cuts in the benefits directed at those most in need and such a huge growth in the activity of charities, so that people must go cap in hand to them, since the Government came to power?

The Government are not satisfied with changing the regulations and ethos of the social security system. They seek cuts in the number of staff employed in the social security system, and the result is that people's claims are not processed. Yesterday the social security office that covers south Bristol closed for the day. The telephone lines were disconnected and the doors were locked by management, who said that staff would have no chance to process the applications they already had unless they stopped claimants coming through the doors; there were simply not enough of them to do the work. The Government have cut staff so that they cannot do the work, they have changed the priorities of the system, and they deny people their basic rights. That is nothing to be proud of.

The Gracious Speech does not give us a review, it does not tell us how the Government might correct the appalling mistakes they have made, and it does not commit them to a universal welfare state. But they do say that they will seek to amend further the social security legislation. The Government have revealed their hand. Despite the crocodile tears about people in need and poverty, they seek to ensure that those people do not receive the benefits to which they are entitled on the basis of need, but that they have to beg for them. If people are not prepared to do that, they will not receive benefits. That is not a social security system but a system of tyranny. It blames the poor for their circumstances, which are a direct result of the Government's economic policies.

I am not prepared to congratulate the Government on that record. They should be ashamed of it. I cannot believe that the Labour party, even at its worst, would be so inhumane as the Government have been in the past year.

8.19 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) touched me, because I have some similar cases in my constituency. Nevertheless, the economic motor has to be there before any benefits can be given out. However good our intentions, if we cannot raise the money, we cannot give it out, and this Government have been uniquely successful in raising money before they set about giving out benefits.

Coming from Cleveland, as I do, I wish to refer to the section in the Gracious Speech which announces:

> "A Bill will be introduced to improve and rationalise the law governing the care and protection of children."

In my view, such a measure is long overdue. Any reform of the law relating to children must start with a clear statement that children have a right to be cared for and brought up by their parents and that parents have the right and responsibility to look after their children. I believe that children should be looked after by one or other parent and removed only in the most exceptional circumstances.

In any Bill, I should therefore seek to ensure that those exceptional circumstances were set out in the most clear and unequivocal way. I suggest that they should include circumstances in which one or other parent has physically or sexually abused the child or in which a parent has failed to fulfil his obligations to feed, clothe, educate, or discipline a child and administer to his needs. They should also include circumstances in which a parent has been negligent towards the child's safety.

All that has already been set out definitively in the European convention on human rights, and in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1959, principle 7 of which states:

> "the best interests of the child shall be the guiding principle of those responsible for his education and guidance; that responsibility lies in the first place with his parents."

Principle 9, which should also be incorporated in English law, states:

> "a child shall be protected against all forms of cruelty, neglect and exploitation by his parents."

There should be some kind of general statement at the beginning of the Bill that sets out the relative position of the child and his parents along the lines of those great declarations. Otherwise, the rights and responsibilities involved are not enforceable in English law.

I welcome the Bill published earlier today. It clarifies 32 pieces of legislation over the years which have led to immense confusion among lawyers and the public. The fact that conflicting jurisdictions have been exercised by different courts simultaneously has led to parents and children being torn several ways following a single incident of matrimonial discord.

Last summer something happened that generated great interest throughout the nation in the rights of children and parents. The thing started in June 1987—unfortunately, the month when I became Member of Parliament for Stockton, South. I am talking, of course, of the Cleveland child abuse crisis, as it was called at first. It then became a controversy and then, happily, the subject of an inquiry. Subsequently, the Cleveland child abuse report was published by Lord Justice Butler-Sloss.

When the inquiry was concluded, the matter was sent back to Cleveland county council, which set up a working party that reported in August 1988. The report contains several pages of recommendations. The Conservative party was represented on the working party. Conservative county councillors took part in all the sessions and considered carefully whether they should issue a minority report at the end of the process. They did not do so, because in the end they agreed with the recommendations. In particular, they agreed with the recommendations that appear on the blue pages.

Recommendation 22.5 relates to Mr. Michael Bishop, the director of social services. It states:

> "Whilst recognising the outstanding individual caring qualities of the county director of social services, we feel that our inquiries into the implications of the Butler-Sloss report have revealed what we consider to be major management deficiencies in the social services department, such as to warrant a recommendation to the county council that the social services committee consider the matter further for positive action."

Recommendation 22.6 referred to Mrs. Sue Richardson, the Cleveland child abuse co-ordinator:

> "We have carefully considered the part played by Mrs. Sue Richardson in the crisis last year and the criticisms of her made in the Butler-Sloss report. We are firmly of the opinion that she should not be employed in social work by the local authority and the social services committee are recommended to act on this recommendation."

Recommendation 22.7 of the report was in respect of the chief constable of Cleveland, Mr. Christopher Payne:

> "Whilst recognising that the chief constable had no strict constitutional duty to overcome these problems, we nevertheless regret that in practice he did not see fit to try and resolve the problems with appropriate haste, and we wish to draw these concerns to the attention of the police authority."

What happened following the issue of the working party report in August? Unfortunately, the county council backed down. It was on the brink of carrying out all the recommendations, but it failed on three counts. I have to ask whether that was due to political pressure in the background or the threat of a strike by the local authority unions. Whichever is the case, the social services committee failed to implement the recommendations.

We have to point the finger of blame at the Cleveland social services committee. It was responsible for the employment of all the individuals in the case, apart from the two doctors. It should have called in the officers earlier and asked them certain pertinent questions. It should have detected the sudden surge in place of safety orders and care applications being made by the county council social services department. On all those counts, it failed. It is now considering recommendations that it employ a deputy director of social services with specific duties relating to child care. Why did it not employ such a deputy before? Some hon. Members will say that it did not think of it, but when the Conservatives left control of the county council

[Mr. Tim Devlin]

it was policy to have such a deputy specifically in charge of child care services. The Labour group chose not to adopt that policy.

I fear that one difficulty has been that Cleveland social services committee is chaired by an old and blind man who has attracted certain sympathy, even though he is plainly not up to his job, and his committee has failed to fulfil its obligations. Cleveland would have had that deputy and should have acted faster, and I am afraid that it is at the Labour party's door that I have to lay the blame for some of the things that happened.

What has been the response of the majority Labour group on the council? First, it called in Viewpoint Productions Ltd., public relations consultants, which issued a self-congratulatory piece in the local paper from the public relations officer who said how well managed the whole crisis was. Unfortunately, the crisis is not over. There are still steps to be taken and there are two legally aided cases against the doctors and the social services department which will come before the High Court in due course. I am a trustee of the Cleveland Families Trust, which has consulted a solicitor; we expect to issue proceedings in two more cases shortly to follow the case of B on which proceedings have already been issued. I warn the social services department that it will soon find itself facing further cases, probably those of C and A.

I am pleased that Cleveland will not now turn out to be the heart-breaking disaster that it was once envisaged to be. The Bill lifts our eyes from personalities to principles and shows the principles of child care law to be in a mess. The Bill recommends several changes, lays down general principles for the courts, reproduces the law in a much more manageable form and introduces the new emergency protection order of eight days only which is to be renewed only once. I note with satisfaction that this new EPO will be challengeable after three days.

The Bill envisages a statutory role for the police in investigating child abuse with a 72-hour care order. I note with satisfaction the new working guidelines to social services departments over the summer which state clearly that the police and social services should set up joint teams to investigate these matters. The Bill further specifically sets out provisions designed to cut delays and introduces the new ideas that any delay will be to the detriment of the child, unless proven otherwise.

In the Gracious Speech, Her Majesty said:

> "A Bill will be introduced to improve and rationalise the law governing the care and protection of children."

The Bill does that to a great extent, but it does not go far enough. Lord Justice Butler-Sloss called for an office of child protection to have the following responsibilities: first, the scrutiny of local authorities' applications for care orders to ensure that prima facie grounds are well founded; secondly, power to call for additional investigation or reports; thirdly, power to invite a local authority to reconsider the bringing of care proceedings; and, fourthly, the administration of guardian ad litem panels. The office should also be able to determine parties to proceedings.

Parents should be parties whenever their children are involved in any form of court proceeding. All those functions could be placed under the jurisdiction of a multi-layered family court. It is insufficient to remove the more obvious shortcomings of present arrangements. We need a fundamental change in court methods. The lack of that provision is the only major flaw in the Bill and the only area where the Government have failed to fulfil the promise of the Gracious Speech.

The format of family courts has been widely debated and most key features are agreed. Most of the proposals would lead to major savings in legal aid and other costs borne by taxpayers. I shall not bore the House by reading out the enormous list of names of organisations interested in family courts which have lent their support to the family courts campaign. The Secretary of State will know that the list is considerable, and it includes several widely respected organisations.

In 1980, New Zealand introduced such a system and the Finer committee reported on the desirability of such a system in this country in 1974—14 years ago. Perhaps that was ill-timed because there were two major reorganisations under way: one in local government and the other in the Health Service. Now that those organisations and the fabric of social provision have settled down perhaps the time has come to provide a much fairer family court system. The present system is inappropriately adversarial, and proceedings in one court can be spun out pending proceedings in another.

The Finer committee report laid down six criteria for such a court: that it should have the power of impartial adjudication; a unified structure; the best possible conciliation service; a professionally trained social work staff to assist it; a close working relationship with social services departments; and that it should gain confidence and provide convenience. I am at one with the Association of Directors of Social Services on that, although I may have fallen out with my local department.

We should have one court and it should have an integrated, unified jurisdiction over all matters of family stress, including guardianship and custody disputes, juvenile delinquents, maintenance, matrimonial property, domestic assaults, child neglect, cruelty, adoption and affiliation. It could do everything that Lord Justice Butler-Sloss called for, provided that a character like the reporter in Scottish child panels was involved at the bottom of the pyramid to test the strength of the social services' case at the outset. A family court would also have power to make people parties, which would mop up the criticisms sometimes made about interested people, such as grandparents, who are at present excluded from making applications to the court.

We should strengthen the court by making it a judges' court. Social services departments like dealing with magistrates. The Bristol study, which was undertaken some years ago, showed that no magistrate ever refused a place of safety order application and that some of these applications could be made for up to 28 days and then renewed for a further 28. That was criminal. When people have to deal with judges they are asked searching questions. Judges deal with all the arrangements, particularly access, which caused great anxiety to parents in Cleveland. Judges have great experience and real powers to back up their decisions and orders. They like to see again a case they deal with, and they try not to, and in most cases do not, allow cases to be lost in the system.

When I raised this matter in a memo to the Lord Chancellor this summer, I was told that there were still disagreements on form. I hope that they can be resolved before the Bill comes to the House so that we can add a family court system into what is already an excellent Bill.

The other power which family courts need is a medical power—not just an adjunct to an emergency protection order, such as is suggested in the Bill, but a simple investigative power—so that somebody could receive an order, without any implication of child abuse in the first instance, but merely on suspicion, to enable or force a child to be taken to a doctor for a medical examination. That was an additional power for social workers suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley), now the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, in her Ten-minute Bill which I was proud to support.

Perhaps we should consider the system of ex parte and inter partes applications to judges that we have for property. In the same way as we have a Mareva injunction, perhaps injunctions in the family court should proceed with social services departments having to give undertakings in damages should they prove to be wrong.

We should also urgently set up an inquiry into the national extent of child abuse. One problem that bedevilled the debate on Cleveland was the many people coming on the scene shouting different odds, such as one in three, one in 10 and 0·4 per cent. We heard the American figures of 1 million cases of all types of abuse seen annually, 58 per cent. of which involved neglect and 25 to 40 per cent. of which involved physical abuse. That margin of inexactitudes in relation to 1 million cases boggles the mind. But the figure for sexual abuse, at 2 per cent., was precise.

This Session we have the opportunity to change a good Bill into a great one that will safeguard our children for a century or more. We should recall the great Lord Shaftesbury and his interest in children in the last century, and not be daunted by the scale of our task. There are sad and sickening cases of child abuse. There are peculiar and sadistic adults. There are children whose childhood is a degrading and lamentable shame. Children are murdered with shocking regularity. We must do all that we can to improve the law to protect those children in the future. Unfortunately, the law has suffered from neglect. We must not fall short in our effort nor fail in our endeavour.

The county that I represent has thrown down a challenge. I hope that the Government will rise to meet that challenge.

8.42 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), but some of us have been in the Chamber all day trying to speak in the debate. At the beginning of the day Mr. Speaker appealed for brief speeches so that everyone would have an opportunity to speak. The hon. Gentleman has not been here for a long time, yet he took 22 minutes to make his speech. That is not fair.

I am sick of hearing Conservative Members spouting statistics about pensioners. During the speech of the Secretary of State for Social Security I asked whether, like me, he had crossed the doorsteps of many elderly and disabled people. As he did not respond, I take it that he has not done so. If an elderly or disabled person has a problem, I make it a priority to go to him. I do not expect him to come to me.

The Secretary of State for Employment used to be responsible for pensions when he was Secretary of State for Social Services. I doubt whether he has crossed many doorsteps, except at election time when looking for votes. I bet that he has not crossed doorsteps to examine the problems that people have at home, to discuss them privately, to get all the facts and to discover how those people are being robbed by the Government.

I know why the Secretary of State cannot cross many doorsteps. For many weeks my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and I served on the Comittee that considered what is now the Employment Act 1988, but the Secretary of State did not attend very often. His reason was not the need to cross doorsteps in his constituency to visit people with problems. He was travelling the world, including Sweden and America. Instead of attending a Committee that was discussing the Bill, he was going all over the place.

I must praise the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, who worked hard on that Committee. He is not here now, but I hope that the Secretary of State will pass on my comments. At one sitting the hon. Gentleman had a terrible cold and should have been in bed, but because the Secretary of State was in Sweden he had to stay on the job. My hon. Friend will remember that the hon. Gentleman dried up completely and could not get another word out. Doing my duty as a Whip in the Committee, I gave him a glass of water so that he could continue his speech. Opposition Members can be very kind. All the wicked things are done by Conservative Members. I wish to refer to some of those wicked things as they relate to the Gracious Speech.

While I am talking about Her Majesty, may I mention something that attracted my attention when I attended the House of Lords to listen to the Gracious Speech. Her Majesty looked so regal and beautiful sitting on the Throne. I regularly have visitors down here from my consituency and take them on the two-hour trip through the House of Commons and the House of Lords, but they can never see the Throne because there is a filthy old cover on it. That Chair is beautiful, and I make a special request that that filthy cover be thrown away and replaced by a new cover—preferably a plastic one so that people can see through it, because that beautiful Chair is worth seeing.

When my constituents ask me what the Throne is like I cannot answer, because I see it only when Her Majesty is sitting on it, and she blocks my view. I hope that that message will be heard. The very nice gentleman who is sitting in the Serjeant-at-Arms's Chair has probably taken note of what I said, as have you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the Clerk at the Table——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. None of this is in the Gracious Speech.

Mr. Haynes: No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I have got it in.

The Gracious Speech stated:

> "My Government will maintain a substantial aid programme, designed to alleviate poverty and to promote sustainable economic and social progress in developing countries."

I have underlined the words,

> "My Government will maintain a substantial aid programme designed to alleviate poverty"

and left it at that. That lot on the Conservative Benches have created poverty, and there is a lot of it in my constituency. I get around my constituency and I see it with my own eyes. Some of the things that the Government are doing, particularly to the elderly and the disabled, make me want to weep.

[Mr. Haynes]

I visited a disabled person on Sunday morning. I make all my visits on Sunday, because that is the only time that I have to make them. *[Interruption.]* I sometimes go to church too. I went to the remembrance service and I marched in the cold weather. I carry out my responsibilities, but nearly every Sunday, except when I am on holiday of course, I can make my visits.

Last Sunday I visited an elderly gentleman in his eighties in a wheelchair, who had a leg amputated a few years ago. His health has deteriorated and his wife can hardly do anything for him because of her age and the state of her health. That gentleman applied for an attendance allowance and he was rejected. It is disgusting the way that such matters are being looked at. Unless the Secretary of State for Social Security can prove that I am wrong—this is an accusation that I have made before—I still believe in my innner self that those medical visitors who go into people's homes are ready to reject any claim even before they cross the threshold. The real pressure is on, from the top of the Department all the way down, not to spend too much money. All the suffering goes on. I see it with my own eyes.

Her Majesty also said that her Government will take further action on crime. You have been here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a lot longer than I have. I came here almost 10 years ago. Since the day when the Conservative Government came into power they have spent billions of pounds on the police force. They have increased its manpower. The hon. Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown) is agreeing with me. He may not agree with me in a moment, but he will if he is honest.

The Government have substantially increased policemen's earnings. They have put billions of pounds into new modern equipment so that the police can do their job, yet the crime figures have rocketed. If those statistics were from here, they would lift the roof off. When asked to provide money for other purposes the Prime Minister says, "It is all taxpayers' money." Taxpayers' money was provided for the police, and it is still being provided, yet crime is still increasing. I am seizing this opportunity to make that point again, as Labour Members do regularly, because in the Gracious Speech Her Majesty referred to bringing down crime.

I want to deal with another point that annoys me a little. It is to do with women's rights. I remember women's rights—equality of the sexes—being put on the statute book in 1970 by my former right hon. Friend Mrs. Castle. I also remember some of the comments that were made by the Secretary of State for Employment about women's rights. He says many things, but one is that women can go and work in the pits. He does not know what he is talking about. I did 35 years in the pits. The right hon. Gentleman does not have a clue. I bet that he has never been down one. I know that the present occupant of the Serjeant at Arms' Chair knows all about the pits. I have taken him down one and he knows what it is really all about. I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know what pit work is all about, because you have visited pits, in particular as part of your responsibilities during the previous Socialist Administration. But the right hon. Gentleman does not have a clue. He should visit a pit to see what it is like.

I want to make two points out of many that I could make about not having women in the pits. First, I worked on the coal face for 20 years and on many occasions rain poured on to us out of the strata, and we wore nothing but boots. How can anyone take a woman into such an environment? My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) introduced a ten-minute Bill about page three in *The Sun*. I understand her feelings and those of other female Members about that kind of thing, but to take a woman on the coal face when that kind of thing is happening is ridiculous.

I remember occasions when we were working in the pouring rain in our boots and the manager, the overman in charge of the district and the deputy, came down to tell us that some visitors were coming and ask us to cover up because the vicar's wife was in the group. The Secretary of State expects women to work in such conditions.

Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman something else that he does not know. In the House of Commons, or in his home—I do not know whether he lives in his constituency as I do—after he uses the toilet he can pull the chain and that is it, the toilet is flushed and everything is finished. No one can do that in a pit.

Mr. Allen McKay: A No. 8 shovel.

Mr. Haynes: My hon. Friend is correct. I had a No. 10 shovel, not a No. 8, which is as big as a table top. The Secretary of State does not understand that. I agree that there should be equality between the sexes, but there are certain circumstances where that cannot happen. When th[illegible]retary of State says that females should be allowed underground, he is talking not about the pit top but underground. I have never heard anything so stupid in all my life. When my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West and I are in the Committee on the next Employment Bill, I hope that the Secretary of State will be there, because he will get a clobbering, particularly on that issue.

Mr. Fowler: I shall put the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) on to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Haynes: Unlike the right hon. Gentleman, I never take that hon. Lady's name in vain.

The sale of the electricity industry is also mentioned in the Gracious Speech. It is related to the industry that I came from, because 80 per cent. of its production is for the electricity industry. The Government's plans to privatise will have an effect on the mining industry. They have been telling the coal mining industry that it must break even and then go into profit. As a result, there have been further pit closures and fewer jobs. British Coal is now doing another review of pit closures, so we shall be in a right mess when the electricity industry is privatised.

A problem will be created. While the Government have been telling the industry that it must break even, the industry has been selling off the houses that it owns. In the Nottinghamshire area there are only 138 left. For two years we have been visiting Hobart house and British Coal's area offices to try to get a fair deal for the people in those properties, because a load of spivs and financial whiz kids will try to buy them. If we had not stepped in, British Coal would have sold them to those people by auction.

British Coal made a mistake, and because of the representations that we made it withdrew. Now, with 138 houses left, British Coal has gone out to tender, without any consultation or negotiation with the Nottinghamshire Members of Parliament, which is shocking. I hope that

that will be taken up with British Coal. Last Monday morning, we had a meeting attended by local councillors, four Members of Parliament and people living in the properties. We had hoped to try to sort something out. British Coal was invited but came nowhere near the meeting. It was frightened to death. It knew what it would get if it attended. British Coal should come off that one.

I should like to refer to local government and democracy. This afternoon I was invited by Yorkshire Television to be interviewed on the matter. The Government—*[Interruption.]* I want the Secretary of State to listen without speaking to my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West. He will have the opportunity to do so from the Dispatch Box.

I want the Secretary of State to realise that many people in my constituency, and probably in his constituency, believe that the Government are destroying democracy, particularly in local government. I remember, before 1979, when the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) picked up the Mace and swung it round his head. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown), he did not have to pay for it, although he probably did not damage it. When the right hon. Gentleman was in opposition he said, "When we Tories get into power there will be less central control." But there is more control now than there was then; the Government have gone in the other direction and destroyed democracy in local government. They tell those in local government what to do. They have shackled them and put chains around them. They have fastened them down and told them that they can do only what the Government say they can do.

I served in local government for 16 years before I came to the House, in high places in the county council. Long before I became a member of any local authority, those people always had the right to determine the destiny of the district that they represented, with proper representation for the people in that community. We had problems at the time with council house rents. I remember the Housing Finance Bill of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). It was terrible. It told local authorities exactly what they had to do.

Here we go again, because the Government will tell local authorities that they cannot transfer money from the rates fund to the housing revenue account. That is total interference. It has always been a right of local authorities to do what they want on behalf of the people, as the people have the opportunity to kick out councillors if their actions are not satisfactory, in the same way as the present Government will be kicked out the next time there is a general election, because of all the bad things that are going on.

I make my final point. I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are looking at your watch, and I am looking at mine. It is now five minutes past 9 o'clock.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should start worrying when I begin shaking my watch.

Mr. Haynes: I see that, according to the clock, my watch is one minute fast.

I listened to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and although there are two more contributions to come, I believe that his must be the best speech of the day. I thoroughly enjoyed it and hung on to every word. He really put the case for the Opposition, as to our feelings about the Gracious Speech. I enjoyed every moment of my hon. Friend's contribution and had to tell him so immediately afterwards. I look forward to hearing more speeches of that kind from my hon. Friend.

9.5 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): It is a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), one I have not had before. The hon. Gentleman chided the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) for speaking for 22 minutes, but then went on to address the House for longer than that—although I did enjoy listening to him.

Mr. Haynes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) has only just flipping well walked in. He accused me of speaking for too long. I do not know how long my speech was, but I have been seated here all day and he has not.

Mr. Harris: I was pulling the hon. Gentleman's leg. I have only a few minutes, and so I shall confine myself to making brief points.

The most tantilising sentence in the Gracious Speech is right at the end:

> "Other measures will be laid before you."

I suppose that all right hon. and hon. Members have candidates for "other measures". I would like to see among any miscellaneous legislation a measure to right a wrong perpetrated by this House over the registration of common land.

I cite a case in my constituency, which I am sure other right hon. and hon. Members can do. I refer to a house and a garden that was designated, wrongly and inaccurately, as common land, and there is no means of redress under current law. I hope that a simple Bill can be introduced with all-party agreement giving justice to all who are suffering in that way.

I should also like a measure to the introduced meeting the widespread problem of people moving around the country in convoys—hippies—and causing a lot of trouble to those on whose land they squat and park their vehicles. It is true that, under the Public Order Act 1986, it is possible for the police to take action with reasonable safeguards, if more than 12 vehicles are parked in such a way. That number is far too high. I could cite examples from my own constituency, where a number of hippies and people following such a life style have camped on private land, causing its owners no end of trouble. The problem should be re-examined.

I draw attention also to the way in which social security payments are made to such people in contravention, I believe, of the clear rules concerning availability for work —the test that a person who receives social security payments must be available for and ready to take up employment. I do not understand how people who move around the country, perhaps following pop festivals during the summer, can meet that test. Again, I can cite examples of constituents who entered training schemes at their own expense having been denied benefit, or whose benefit was stopped because they failed the test of availability for work. However, hippies who go round the country from pop festival to pop festival are paid. What is more, and probably quite rightly, the Department has a team of officers who go around and pay them. I understand the reasons for that. It cuts down on fraud, but

[Mr. Harris]

it is expensive. When pop festivals are held in my constituency during the summer, three officers travel to Penzance. Their expenses, on top of their salaries, amount to £362, simply to pay the hippies who participate in pop festivals. That is wrong.

I do not want to penalise those who follow that life style, but the rules that apply to everyone else—rules about the standard of vehicles, or the payment of benefit, or law and order and noise levels—should also apply to these people. I ask Her Majesty's Government to look at that point. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security is here. I hope he will look into that issue because it is causing widespread concern throught southern England.

9.11 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): The Secretary of State for Social Security began the debate by unwrapping a package of significant new measures for elderly and disabled pensioners, which all hon. Members welcome. We realise that it was generated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer's briefing gaffe, but, whatever its genesis or provenance, we still welcome it. However, the Secretary of State ought to put his package into perspective. It is important that he is offering an additional £200 million to pensioners, but he should recognise that, because of the break of the link with earnings, this Government are robbing pensioners this year and every year of over £5,000 million.

It is important that some of the most needy pensioners will receive an additional £2 a week, but it is also important that the Secretary of State should recognise that, because of the state earnings-related pension scheme, the average pensioner today receives an additional £25 a week on top of the basic pension. The Secretary of State was so anxious to lambast the record of the last Labour Government that it is ironic that he failed to see, apparently, that the reason why pensioners are now considerably better off is solely because of the state earnings-related pension scheme and the minimum private pension guarantee that it involves. That was a Labour Government measure. The Secretary of State failed to acknowledge that his predecessor tried to abolish that measure. Furthermore, this Secretary of State intends to wind it down.

This Government are responsible only for the basic pension. Under a Labour Government, it increased during a five-year period by 20 per cent. During the last nine years, under a Tory Government, it has increased by only slightly over 2 per cent. The increase is welcome, but the Government's record must be put into perspective.

As is always the case, these debates are wide-ranging and it would be wrong if I were to take up too much time by referring to previous speeches. However, I wish to refer to some of the speeches that were made by my hon. Friends. My hon. Friends made important points which I hope will be taken on board.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) referred to the inadequate help that is given, even with the latest measures, to the disabled—in particular to help them back to work, which is what they want most of all. He drew attention to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' figures that are now accepted as showing that the number of disabled people is about twice as great as the Government previously recognised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) made a telling speech pointing out the personal and individual effects of the benefit cuts—which we talk about so glibly in the House but which impact so harshly on individuals in particular—and quoted from a benefits survey in her constituency.

I also noted the strictures on training of my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) and the recommendations of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) which I hope the Secretary of State will take on board. He suggested that allowances for employment training could be doubled for as little as £180 million. That would make a considerable difference to attitudes to the scheme. He also brought up the question of a jobs guarantee, which has also been mooted recently.

I shall not try to encompass all that was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). I should like, however, to take up a point that he made about the nurses' regradings, which was very much along the lines of my own thinking. The Government need to answer this question, but they have not yet done so: how can working to grade be considered industrial action? If working to grade disrupts activity on the ward, that simply demonstrates how wrong the grading originally was. If working to grade is industrial action according to section 1 of the Employment Act 1988, that surely demonstrates precisely how draconian the legislation is.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) dealt with social security issues, and I shall now deal with employment issues—and in particular with the employment Bill, portrayed in the Queen's Speech as a further step in the deregulation of the labour market. In my view, it is much more accurately seen as a concentration of power in the hands of the employer, and a further de-protection—if I may use an ugly word for an ugly process—of employment conditions for most, or at least many of the most vulnerable sections of the labour market. We must wait to see the details of the Bill, but it is already clear that employers will find it considerably easier to sack people, while workers will find it considerably harder to fight for what remains of their rights at work.

The Government claim that they wish to increase employment opportunities for women and young people, and they therefore propose to end restrictions on the type of work that women can undertake—particularly in such industries as pottery, lead manufacture and mining. There is no doubt that a handful of women will as a result gain jobs hitherto denied them. I am sure that we shall be treated to an endless series of pictures of coal-black women in pit helmets standing outside colliery gates, no doubt with British Coal shares in their hands. Nevertheless, we must ask what are the realities behind such photo opportunities. How can the Government seriously lay claim to extending equal opportunities for women when they have systematically chipped away at all the protections against exploitation that have been built up for them over the past century?

Perhaps I take a rather different view from my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) about allowing women to go down the mines. Allowing them to go down the mines is one thing, but the same Government rescinded the fair wages resolution that provided a minimum floor for women's pay, cut back the scope of the wages councils that protected women, exposed them to longer working hours in manufacturing and greatly extended the qualifying conditions for employment rights. All those measures hit women, particularly part-time workers, most of whom are women.

The Secretary of State said last Friday—I am sure that he is glad to know that we are avid readers of what he says—at the Cambridge university Conservative association, breathing the rhetoric of gender fairness:

> "The Government is fully committed to the principle of equal opportunities and the elimination of all forms of unfair discrimination."

What world is the Secretary of State living in? According to the recent European Commission report, "Child Care and Equality of Opportunity", Britain, after nearly a decade of Tory government, is the only EEC state that provides no full statutory maternity leave and no parental leave at all. Indeed, the Government have repeatedly blocked EEC directives to that end. For working mothers, Britain has publicly funded services for fewer than 2 per cent. of children under three and for fewer than 1 per cent. of children at primary school. What sort of assistance is that for mothers who want to go back to work? Services are 20 times that level in Denmark.

The United Kingdom is the only EEC state in which employment protection has been reduced in respect of maternity. If the Secretary of State is really anxious about equal opportunities for women at work, it is bizarre that he should start and finish by sending women down the mines and into heavy industry.

Mr. Harris: This is silly.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman says that this is silly, but the silly person is the Secretary of State. These are his proposals. If the hon. Gentleman can suggest any other proposals which the Secretary of State has made to justify his claim about equal opportunities, I shall gladly give way to him.

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman is getting a little confused. At one stage he said that he supported the idea and now he has come out against it. That is not an unfamiliar position for him to take, but may we have a clear statement on whether he is, in principle, in favour or not in favour?

Mr. Meacher: I am certainly not against it, but it is absurd that the only thing that the Government can claim in respect of improving opportunities for women is the fact that they are enabling women to go down the mines and to work in heavy industry.

It seems eccentric, to say the least, that the Secretary of State should spend a great deal of time and money emphasising this point to employers who need to retain women workers—he said it again a few weeks ago—when the Government have removed the right to return to work after pregnancy for women who work in small companies and when they have chosen to tax workplace creches on the same basis as company cars, as if they were a perk. What sense does that make?

Another major feature of the proposed Bill is the removal of what the Government like to call unnecessary and outdated restrictions on the hours of work of young people. I submit that the truth is the opposite. Such restrictions are as vital today—probably more so—to protect young workers in today's laissez-faire economic climate as they were in the Victorian laissez-faire economic climate. Every further year of this Administration makes those restrictions more important.

Young people, by virtue of their inexperience and their under-representation in trade unions, are especially vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers, by whom they are regarded as an opportunity to acquire cheap labour for the most difficult and dangerous jobs. If any hon. Member has any doubt about that, I remind the House that the accident rate for young workers on the youth training scheme and in employment has more than doubled during the past four years to a level which well exceeds the adult accident rate in some of Britain's most dangerous industries such as shipbuilding. Against such a background, to reduce even further protective legislation for young workers is doctrinaire and irresponsible.

The Government's other justification for the measure is that young people's job opportunities are being curtailed by the present legislation. There was a time when the Government would provide evidence before they made allegations such as that, but, with a third election victory and a majority of 100, they do not bother any more. There is no evidence in the consultative document to support that and the Secretary of State has produced nothing to back it up.

The research referred to by the Low Pay Unit points to the opposite conclusion, which is that the removal of the wages councils in 1986, which protected people under the age of 21, has worsened the pay and conditions of young people. However, there is no evidence of any improvement in job opportunities for them. The only opportunities that will be opened for young workers by the removal of the protective legislation are greater opportunities for them to be exploited.

No employment Bill under this Government would be complete without some further assault on individual employment rights. The Secretary of State has not let us down on this occasion. The Bill is an invitation to employers to hire and fire at will. In one swoop, most of the remaining protections for workers, particularly in small firms, will be swept away. We are being taken back to the forelock-tugging era when keeping a job depended on the boss's whim. The Government's approach to an individual's employment rights has all the sensitivity of a salami slicer. When they first took office, the Government raised the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims to one year. Then they raised it to two years for employees in firms with fewer than 20 staff. In 1985 they raised it to two years for all employees. They are now saying that no worker without at least two years' continuous employment with one employer can even ask for a statement of the reasons for dismissal.

The same process of erosion is now being applied to whether one can obtain a written statement from one's employer about grievance and disciplinary procedures. The answer, wrapped up in the convoluted qualifications of the Government's constantly changing regulations, is that if one works for a small firm—half Britain's work force now does so—one is not entitled to an explanation.

I do not know why the Government do not come clean and admit that they believe that employers should have the power to hire and fire whomever they like whenever they like, with hardly anything to stop them.

The same pattern of making it harder for a worker to obtain redress is now being applied to industrial tribunals, where the deterrents are almost punitive. It seems from the

[Mr. Meacher]

Queen's Speech that large deposits may have to be paid before a claim can proceed and that the chairman of the industrial tribunal alone can decide whether a deposit is necessary. That deposit is now to be £150, which is six times the previous level of £25. That previous level was rejected because it would not bite on applicants with a weak case. However, who now decides whether the case is weak? The answer is none other than the chairman, who is an appointee of the Secretary of State, who acts alone and without a trade union representative.

All that illustrates two principles which are becoming increasingly characteristic of the Government's approach. First, they are complicating the rules to make it as difficult as possible for people to obtain their basic rights. That applies to social security as much as to employment rights. They hope that claimants will become lost in a maze of complexity. The second principle is their use of administrative mechanisms to secure a politically loaded result.

It is not only the proposed Bill that shows up those two devices so clearly but, even more so, the code of practice on industrial action ballots which the Government promulgated two weeks ago. It is a highly complicated and lengthy draft of over 100 paragraphs. Unions will have to follow more than 20 stages set out in the code before industrial action can be endorsed. Failure to observe any of the stages could result in employers taking test cases to challenge the conduct of the ballot.

When the Government do not want rights to be exercised they expose people to a highly complicated obstacle course involving a legal minefield. They are trying to pile up insurmountable hurdles to block choice by artificial rules. The code suggests that industrial action should not be taken unless there is a substantial majority or a turnout in secret balloting of at least 70 per cent.

Mr. Flynn: As in the housing ballots.

Mr. Meacher: I was about to come to that point, and I suspect that many hon. Members were thinking of it.

The Government forced trade unions to hold secret ballots, but the trade unions have been winning far too high a proportion of them. The most telling fact in the recent ACAS annual report was that 90 per cent. of the industrial action ballots that unions have been forced to hold resulted in favour of the trade unions, which is why the Government want to move the goal posts.

That is exactly what they did regarding the closed shop ballot under the Trade Union Act 1984. Trade unions were obliged to meet what the Government thought were safely impossible thresholds of obtaining a yes vote—80 per cent. of those eligible to vote or 85 per cent. of those voting. Almost every vote surmounted that artificially high threshold. What did the Prime Minister do? In these matters, the Secretary of State is an agent or a sort of papal nuncio. The Prime Minister decided to cancel the vote and abolish the closed shop altogether. We might call it the David Owen of industrial ballots—"If you cannot win the game, pick up the ball and walk off the field."

If the Government want people to exercise their rights, they bend the rules shamelessly in the other direction. When the Prime Minister wants council tenants to agree to sell their council housing estates to private landlords, she counts those who abstain as being in favour. We thus had the infamous Torbay result a week ago in which three out of five tenants voted, but only about 15 per cent. were in favour of a sale. As the 42 per cent. who did not vote were counted as being in favour, a proposal that had the support of precisely one in seven was passed. There is a case to be made for this indiarubber democracy. It works in many ways and we will be looking for the Prime Minister's support at the next election when all those who abstain will be counted as being in favour of a change of Government.

There is a further item in the Gracious Speech to improve training arrangements. It must be correct because a Government that abolished the grant levy system for training of those in work, cut three quarters of the industrial training boards, axed one third of the skill centres and reduced the number of engineering apprenticeships to an all-time low can only improve.

The one thing that the Government will not do is the one thing that cries out to be done—improve the manifest failings and deficiencies of the employment training scheme. The Government still have taken no action. Given that the number of participants is being doubled while the budget is not being increased by a single penny, the scheme is still grossly underfunded, which means that the training provided must be of poor quality. Participants are still locked in benefit-level poverty. Because top-up is prevented, because it is a social security scheme, ET reduces incentives and introduces social security means testing into the world of training and employment.

Worst of all is the fact that the creeping compulsion surrounding the restart interviews is now reinforced by the switch in the social security Bill from the availability for work test for the unemployed to the criterion of actively seeking work. It is clear that the Government are making ET compulsory, not by formally designating the scheme but by forcing unemployed people on to ET projects, however unsuitable they are and however bad or inappropriate the training may be, on pain of being completely deprived of benefit.

It is not difficult to see why the Government are resorting to compulsion. ET is faring badly because it is a deeply flawed scheme. Two weeks ago, Newcastle city council, which is probably the biggest sole council managing agency, had 43 out of 8,100 places filled. In mid-November, Birmingham city council had 283 out of 3,000 places taken.

The failure of ET to get anywhere near its targets is not the least bit surprising, in view of the dubious activities of the training agencies. At Vernon Training Ltd., one of the agents, a YTS trainee who doubles as a handyman, was used to supervise ET trainees. At Cobalt UK Ltd., security guards are supplied on ET. No training is involved, but the work is for up to 60 hours a week. Sight and Sound, another training agent, sent a joiner to Capricorn Kitchens to work as a joiner—no training, because the person already had the skills needed; it was simply cheap labour. At Barnsley, we found a driver sent from restart to work on the scheme as a driver—again, simply cheap labour. YTS trainees at Merseyside youth training were left unsupervised for days at a time while supervisors were used as placement finders. At Chesterfield, a man sent to a building firm was told to buy his own tools. That is not exactly a high quality training scheme. Also, at Chesterfield, a man sent by Age Concern to work in an old people's home found that there were no facilities for training him. No attempt was made to train him in any aspect of dealing with the old.

The reference in the Gracious Speech to improving training arrangements is not about providing high quality training, which the unemployed desperately need. It is about providing cheap labour and getting people off the dole registers at any price. The new draft code on ballots is not about improving industrial relations but is about trying to hobble the unions with the maximum legal technicalities. Removing restrictions on employment for women and young people is not about extending work opportunities but is about reducing the resistance of those people to exploitation by some unscrupulous employers. Eroding individual employment rights is not about deregulation of the labour market but is about consolidating the power of the employer to hire and fire at will with minimum worker redress.

The two outstanding issues at work that cry out for attention—democracy in the workplace and stronger health and safety provisions—are not even given a mention. The proposed social security Bill is not a Bill to make the future safe for employees but is a Bill to make the workplace and work force safer for employers, and that is why we reject it.

9.39 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Norman Fowler): The most extraordinary omission from the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was that at no stage did he mention the progress made in reducing unemployment. That is a most revealing omission from a speech which rambled over a whole range of other areas.

First, I should congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen) on his speech. We were together in opposition and I remember his speeches on social security and pensions at that time. I look forward to more of the same in the coming months. I thank the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) for his kind words about my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and his conduct of the Employment Bill. My hon. Friend looks forward to doing the same again this Session.

Other impressive speeches came from my hon. Friends the Members for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) and for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard). My hon. Friends the Members for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) and for Kingswood (Mr. Haywood), as well as the hon. Members for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) and for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther), raised one of the major themes of this debate—employment and training. As my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright) said, there is no question but that the employment position in this country has substantially improved. Unemployment has come down and the number of new jobs created has increased substantially. In particular, the position of the long-term unemployed—people who have been out of work for more than a year—has improved.

The House will want to know about new figures that I have published today. These show that in the quarter to October long-term unemployment has fallen by about 60,000. Over the past 12 months, long-term unemployment has fallen by 280,000, and the total of long-term unemployed has been reduced to 886,000. That means that in the past two years long-term unemployment has fallen by nearly 450,000. Those figures contain substantial hope for the long-term unemployed. Long-term unemployment is now falling faster than unemployment generally. Young people have benefited in particular. The number of long-term unemployed people aged 18 to 24 is about half what it was in October 1986.

There are other encouraging signs. For instance, I can tell the hon. Member for Newham, North-East that the number of people unemployed for five years or more is also falling. The figures show that the long-term unemployed are sharing in the steady fall in unemployment. That is encouraging, but it is clear that there is potential for both long-term unemployment and unemployment generally to fall still further. One of the most significant features of the present situation is the continuing high level of vacancies in the economy. For example, there are 250,000 unfilled vacancies in jobcentres, but that figure is only part of the picture. Earlier this year, we commissioned independent research which confirmed that for every jobcentre vacancy there are another two in the economy generally. In other words, we estimate that there are now more than 700,000 unfilled vacancies throughout the country. The distribution of those vacancies obviously varies, but the general position remains that there is a high level of vacancies now available.

We have carried out a special survey in London. It shows that in London there are about 150,000 vacancies, although there are still 265,000 people registered as unemployed. Obviously some of those jobs require skills —require training—but the significant feature is that about 50,000 of the jobs are ready to go into without special training and generally the wages being offered are up to what the unemployed people expect.

The reasons for this improvement are clear. By a whole range of indicators, the British economy is doing dramatically better than it was 10 or 15 years ago. It is not just that we have had a period of sustained growth. It is also that productivity of our industry is up, the increase in unit labour costs in manufacturing has been much slower than for years past, and industrial relations have dramatically improved. We have tackled a number of the most important barriers to jobs—barriers that stood in the way of employment growth.

On the question of industrial relations, we have moved from a position where 13 million working days were lost each year during the 1970s to one where the number of strikes is lower that at any time since 1940. One of the major reasons for that improvement has been the four Acts of Parliament passed by this Government to reform industrial relations.

Of course, not all the improvement can be put down to the reform of the law alone, but equally, without those changes in the law, we would have made substantially less progress. This Government have, step by step, reformed the law on industrial relations, which the public wanted reformed but which the last Labour Government and the one before that were afraid to touch.

The issue of inflation has been raised during the debate. Only yesterday my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he would take all the measures necessary to reduce inflation. We must put the matter in context. Even the current inflation figure of just over 6 per cent. would have been regarded as an overwhelming

[Mr. Norman Fowler]

success by the last Labour Government. If they had achieved that during their term of office, they would have set it first among their achievements.

In fact, what happened? Between 1974 and 1979, inflation averaged more than 15 per cent. For 13 months in 1975 and 1976, inflation never fell below 20 per cent. At its peak, Labour's inflation rate reached the banana republic level of almost 27 per cent. That was the record of the Government of which the hon. Member for Oldham, West was a member and which the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) so loyally supported. It is one further reason why we are not prepared to take lectures on social justice from the Labour party.

There was no social justice in old people being brought to their knees by the financial incompetence of the last Labour Government. There was no social justice in a Government who were the prisoners of the worst prejudices of the most outdated trade unions in the Western world. There was no social justice in the inflation that Labour inflicted on this country. There was no social justice in the Government of the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who cancelled the Christmas bonus twice and fiddled the uprating system and saved more than £1 billion at the expense of social security recipients throughout the country.

Mr. Crowther: Will the right hon. Gentleman remind the House of the inflation rate that the Labour Government inherited from the Conservative Government in 1974?

Mr. Fowler: I have given the House the average over that period because I thought that was the sensible thing to do.

This Government have understood a connection that the Labour Government never recognised—that the basis of any social policy worthy of that name must be a sound economic policy. This Government have pursued economic policies that have produced steady growth and a balanced budget, which have made possible substantial increases in spending on social programmes such as health and social security. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security could make his important announcement this afternoon. The package of measures that he announced—*[Interruption.]* It is interesting that Opposition Members shout and laugh, but the package of measures that my right hon. Friend announced will bring additional help to more than 2·5 million of our least well-off pensioners. The Government are proud to be doing that.

We shall direct almost £200 million to those who genuinely need help. The new measures will tackle something that most people want tackled. They will help those who most need help. It must be right to give help to those who do not have the benefit of an occupational pension or the state earnings-related pension. They have been cruelly affected by the disastrous inflationary policies of the last Labour Government. They had to live through that.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West talked about the state earnings-related pension scheme and missed out entirely the improvements made by occupational pension schemes. He does not recognise that there has been a massive increase in occupational pension cover—literally in the past few months. Some 500,000 personal pensions have been sold, and money purchase schemes have also expanded greatly. That will bring substantial benefit to pensioners of the future.

I shall now deal with the points made by the hon. Member for Livingston. I realise that he is unable to be in the Chamber now. We have reaffirmed our manifesto commitment to child benefit. It will continue in the same form and structure as now and it will be paid directly to the mother. We have always made that clear. I remind the hon. Member for Oldham, West, before he challenges me about uprating, that in 1975, when he was in the Department of Health and Social Security, his Secretary of State, Mrs. Barbara Castle, made it clear that she was opposed to the automatic indexation of child benefit. The hon. Gentleman knows that that was her position and the position of a range of Labour Ministers—doubtless including the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Livingston asked about the youth training scheme. There are now 120,000 youth training scheme places available in Britain, of which 13,000 are available in Scotland. However, I am prepared to consider the individual case that the hon. Gentleman raised. I must make it clear that 16 to 18-year-olds have been given a choice. They can remain in education or take a job and they have the guarantee of the youth training scheme. At present, 120,000 YTS places are available throughout the country.

The hon. Member for Livingston then referred to the new Employment Bill. I must make it clear that we shall continue to pursue policies to remove barriers to the operation of the labour market and to the creation of jobs. As was announced in the Gracious Speech, I shall introduce a Bill shortly to amend the law on employment. One of the prime purposes of the Bill will be to remove outdated statutory restrictions on women's employment and to amend the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to override potentially discriminatory requirements in earlier legislation.

I emphasise again that the Government are firmly committed to the promotion of equal opportunities. Without the contribution of women, now and in the future, many industries and services would clearly be in serious difficulty. There is a higher proportion of women active in the labour force in this country than in any other country in the European Community except Denmark. Women have filled a high proportion of the new jobs created over the past five years. Many have taken advantage of the more flexible working pattern.

The hon. Member for Ashfield expressed concern about women working in mines. At present, the law operates quite irrationally and inconsistently to prevent women from taking certain jobs. For example, women who are surveyors, engineers or geologists cannot work in the mining industry if they have to go below ground regularly or for significant periods. That is the background. Those jobs are simply closed to women at present. There is no health or safety reason for that, and it contradicts the principle of equal opportunities. There is no question of forcing anyone to work underground. That is a matter of individual choice. Under existing law, that choice is simply not available to women. It is not a matter for cheap jokes. It is simply an anti-discriminatory measure. When the hon. Member for Ashfield has had the opportunity of considering the proposals, I feel sure that he will support them.

Mr. Haynes: I have looked at them.

Mr. Fowler: The Bill will also remove many existing restrictions on young people's employment, particularly their hours of work. At present the employment of young people is governed by a mass of complex legislation, involving seven main statutes and a large number of statutory instruments, mostly dating back to the 19th century. The legislation is inconsistent because it applies only to factories, mines, quarries and shops, not to other sectors of employment.

To achieve our social justice involves not just spending money or getting the best value for that money, but recognising the different challenges and doing something about them. Every opinion poll tells us that the challenge that the British public regard as most serious is that of unemployment. It was for that reason that the Government introduced the proposals for the employment training programme for longer-term unemployed people who, by any definition, are a group who need and deserve help.

Our objective is to train unemployed people so that they have the skills often necessary to fill jobs. What was the reaction of the TUC and the Labour party? Both voted to boycott it. I am glad that the TUC may be having second thoughts, but what about the Labour party? Faced with the challenge of unemployment and the opportunity of doing something about it, the Labour party voted to hinder, not help, employment training. With the exception of the Leader of the Opposition at Bournemouth, scarcely a Labour Front-Bench spokesman has been prepared even to support in principle a programme for training the long-term unemployed. We are not prepared to take lectures from the Labour party on the social challenges facing us. The hon. Member for Oldham, West has shown a complete failure of leadership. He did not say yes or no, but tried to catch the way the tide was flowing. We would have had much more respect for him had he made his position clear and supported trade union leaders who were trying to fight for co-operation with employment training.

The Labour party has turned its back on the unemployed and the long-term unemployed. That is not the only issue. When the prospect of new jobs in Dundee came up, the Labour Front Bench retreated into collective silence. They knew that what the Transport and General Workers Union was doing was wrong and that jobs would be lost in Dundee, but they feared to offend a trade union leader who wielded over 1 million block votes. No one can possibly benefit from that policy.

Far from the scheme and programme getting off to a bad start, almost 90,000 are already in training under the programme. That is in the first 10 weeks and despite the opposition of the Labour party and the TUC. We now have about 170 training agents and 1,100 training managers who decided to take part in employment training. The six organisations which have withdrawn from it are all Labour-controlled local authorities, and they must be set aside from the 50 local authorities which are continuing to operate as training managers and the 170 local authorities which continue to operate as training agents.

During the election campaign, we were attacked on the basis that once the election was over unemployment would increase; but since the election, unemployment has decreased by 700,000. Since the election, long-term unemployment has decreased by 300,000. Since the election, the rate of unemployment has fallen faster in Britain than in any other major industrialised country. Since the election, unemployment has decreased not just in London and the south-east, but throughout the country. Under this Government, as many new jobs have been created during the past five years as in the other European Community countries combined. That is the true story of the fall of unemployment, and that is the record of this Conservative Government.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

British Rail Pension Fund

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

10 pm

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): The British Rail pension fund is the fifth largest pension fund in the United Kingdom, valued at about £5,598 million. For a long time I have taken an interest in transport policies, and I am vice-chairman of the Conservative parliamentary transport committee. I am proud to represent many constituents who work in or have retired from the railway industry. I am delighted to initiate the debate and thank in advance my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport, who will respond to the debate.

I single out for praise Mr. Ernest Booth, one of my constituents, who is the president of the British Transport Superannuitants Federation. I have enjoyed working with him and his colleagues on this important issue, as I shall no doubt continue to do. I raise the subject after lengthy correspondence with the Department of Transport and with the chairman of the British Railways Board, Sir Robert Reid.

There are two major concerns: first, the apparent lack of accountability of the fund's management team, and pensioner representation; and, secondly, the proper allocation of surplus funds, especially taking into account those who have contributed for many years.

The constitution of the funds does not provide for representation of the policy-making committees of any retired staff, despite repeated requests. That is almost unbelievable. There are three key contributors to the funds: the British Railways Board, the active staff who are subscribing and the retired staff who have contributed during their working lives and whose subscriptions form a significant proportion of the funds. When the constitutions were drawn up, the number of retired staff was minimal, but now that group outnumbers the employees. There are about £165,000 railway pensioners, a sizeable proportion of whom belong to the British Transport Superannuitants Federation, which has been seeking official representation since 1977. There are more pensioners than the 144,000 employees in the fund. Even on the management committees, there is no pensioner representation. It is a carve-up between the board and the unions, although the National Union of Railwaymen, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen and the Transport Salaried Staffs Association have not contributed a penny to the funds.

Below the management committee, the funds have established a non-statutory joint working party to discuss the surplus and to formulate recommendations. Again, there is no pensioner representation. The working party consists of representatives of the board and the trade unions and ignores key groups, especially pensioners. Of course, its constitution could easily be amended. Pensioner representation on the joint working party was discussed about three years ago. The board's chairman has advised me that the board expressed support for a widening of representation on pension matters, but that that was blocked by the unions.

Although we do not have the pleasure of seeing their representatives in the House tonight—they have already left for their beds and cocoa—railway pensioners must rely, justifiably, on me to make their case. They have contributed their working life to the industry, but they are denied a voice at key levels. It is high time that the funds were reconstituted to give, as of right, places to railway employees past and present.

If one looked for a heavily unionised industry where the muscle power of existing employees could be exerted, but where pensioners, elderly and geographically scattered, seemed powerless, what better example could be taken in the United Kingdom than British Rail? How can those who have retired from the railway industry be sure that trustees are treating them with an even hand?

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security has asked the Occupational Pensions Board to conduct an investigation into how pension rights can be protected. Many arrangements under which pension schemes are presently administered are unsatisfactory, particularly with regard to entitlement to actuarial surpluses and the use of surpluses to fund company contribution holidays. I hope that British Rail will be fully investigated by the OPB. Trustees should be aware that funds are for all members, not least pensioners, and that they have equal status as beneficiaries.

Let me deal now with the second major strand of the debate—the proper allocation of surplus funds. The British Rail pension scheme is divided into two parts—the contributory benefits section, which relates to benefits accrued in most cases after September 1970, and the preserved benefits part, which relates to the remainder of the benefits.

On 1 April 1987—no doubt pensioners see that as all fools' day—the scheme revealed a surplus of £1,169 million in the contributory benefits section, and a surplus of £285 million in the other part, even though the latter arises only if payments by the Government under the Transport Act 1980 continue at their present level. The scheme's actuary estimated the value of those payments at £395 million. In total, that is a truly exceptional surplus.

Like bees round a honey pot, British Rail management and unions decided how to carve up that surplus, much of which had been secured through the contributions of those now retired. The payout for pensioners was a derisory flat sum of £2 a week on top of a 4·2 per cent. increase based on the rate of inflation at that time.

However, it was a different story for British Rail and the unions, who jointly decided to give a boost to the take-home pay of present staff, while cutting the board's contributions by some £55 million. British Rail raised basic pay rates by 5 per cent. from 11 April this year. Much more quietly, they effectively boosted real pay in July by cutting the sum paid by employees to the fund. Contributions were reduced by half. That meant a boost to the weekly pay packet of a railman of £2·32, a guard of £2·78, a train driver of £3·94 and a clerical officer on grade four of £4·93. Those sums are even greater in the London area.

The publicity leaflet, Mr. Speaker, which I am delighted to show you tonight says, "Benefits up, contributions down." But the shameless fact that contributions were being halved by cutting what should justifiably go to pensioners was not spelt out.

After a long correspondence with British Rail and the Department of Transport, which started in January this year, I have been instrumental in gaining a little more of the honey for the pensioners, and the Government have confirmed that they will not alter their contribution—an honourable course taken by my hon. Friend's predecessor.

What of the latest deal? Now, almost a week after being notified by you, Mr. Speaker, of this Adjournment debate, and suitable publicity being given to that fact, British Rail has mysteriously written to me to inform me that it has thought again about its pensions and will double the sum offered to the greater of £4 a week or 15 per cent. of pensions. That is the measure of your power, Mr. Speaker, in selecting Adjournment debates.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that one sign of the power of Parliament is Mr. Speaker, but that there is nothing that concentrates the mind more than doing what my hon. Friend has done in having an Adjournment debate on this matter, which is of considerable importance?

Mr. Gregory: I am always grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for his contributions. He made his point poignantly.

The comment by the British Railways Board that it is prepared effectively to double the offer to the pensioners to the greater of £4 a week or 15 per cent. of the current pension is welcome but tardy after repeated representations and still does not treat employees and railway pensioners on an equitable basis. The proper use of surpluses should be to help pensioners and to retain funds for those who will retire, rather than to carry out a back-door manoeuvre of artificially boosting current pay rates—above those of other nationalised industry workers—to current staff.

I have exposed two major problems that affect pensioners in the railway industry. There are conflicting interests between the employers and different classes of beneficiary. There should be compulsory representation on all the funds of the different classes of interest. Indeed, in view of the dogmatic approach taken by the unions in denying pensioner representation, there is much to be said for the British Rail pension fund being managed by a wholly independent trust corporation, with adequate allowance for consultation.

An independent body, such as the ombudsman—I was instrumental in the House in pushing for a building societies ombudsman—to ensure that everything is clear, fair and above board would be welcome. If it is acting in the interest of all beneficiaries, British Rail should welcome rather than frustrate such a development.

I hope that after this debate the funds will find that suitable representation covering both salaried and wage grades from the British Transport Superannuitants Federation can be accepted. I am sure that such representatives would watch the interests of the rapidly growing number of retired staff. Above all, they would be vigilant at the formative stages in the policy-making process to ensure that there was a fair application of any surplus funds to which their key sections had contributed.

10.12 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Michael Portillo): It is a great pleasure to debate with my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory), and I congratulate him on securing this debate. I thank him for his great courtesy towards me in the run-up to the debate.

My hon. Friend's constituency is well known as one of the premier railway towns of Britain. He has gained a reputation for speaking with passion for his constituency, but always in a manner that is fair and extremely well informed. He has become as much a master of railways as he is a master of wine.

I thank my hon. Friend for bringing to my attention the work of his constituent, Mr. Ernest Booth, the president of the British Transport Superannuitants Federation. Clearly, he is an assiduous campaigner for the rights of his members and pensioners.

The British Rail pension fund is an independent legal entity. British Rail management and unions have equal representation on the management committee. Ministers have no direct involvement in the running of the pension scheme or any specific powers in relation to the distribution of surpluses.

The fact that there are no pensioner representatives on the management committee or joint working party of the scheme should not be seen as constituting a lack of accountability. It is perhaps an over-simplification to assume that the scheme needs to be directly accountable to pensioners in that way. The terms of the scheme guarantee both pensions and cost of living increases. The pensioners are therefore receiving exactly what they paid for when they were contributing members. The management of the fund does not threaten them, because their position is protected.

Most British Rail pensioners are ex-trade union members and are represented in the British Rail scheme by the unions on the management committee, the scheme's decision-making body, and on the joint working party, the negotiating forum, as my hon. Friend described. I know of no evidence that the majority of pensioners are unhappy with that arrangement.

The board keeps in touch with a number of pensioners' associations and has discussed the distribution of the surplus with those bodies. However, there is no association that could claim to represent a majority of the 165,000 current and deferred pensioners.

The board recognises that the BTSF represents a significant number of pensioners, although its 20,000 members still account for only a minority. Three years ago the federation was unsuccessful in its application to be represented on the joint working party. However, last year the board suggested to the BTSF that it might once again put forward its case for representation. That invitation was repeated by British Rail's chairman in February, but there has been no response. I understand that the board will be happy to discuss the case for representation with the BTSF, and therefore the ball is in the federation's court.

It would be unusual for a pension fund to appoint an independent ombudsman, as my hon. Friend suggested, and there is no justification for singling out the British Rail scheme in that way. The question of independent trustees and of independent pensions arbitration is, as my hon. Friend said, being examined by the Occupational Pensions Board's wider review of the balance of interest of employers and pension scheme members. I understand that the OPB will report by the end of the year.

The OPB has not "investigated" the BR scheme or any other. It is carrying out a general review of the balance of interests between employers, trustees and members of pension schemes. It will not draw any conclusions about any individual schemes. The BTSF has not submitted any evidence to the OPB's review. It was not specifically invited

[Mr. Michael Portillo]

to do so, but the press notice announcing the review made it clear that the OPB would be pleased to hear from anyone with an interest.

I shall now deal with the distribution of the surplus, of which my hon. Friend gave an accurate account. As he said, a recent valuation of the fund revealed an actuarial surplus of £1,454 million. Of that, £1,169 million arose on the contributory benefits section, which operates in a conventional way, receiving no assistance from the Exchequer. The remaining £285 million surplus arose on the fund's preserved benefits section. That relates entirely to historic liabilities, has no contributing members and is funded in part by the Exchequer.

In the light of the surplus, Ministers reviewed whether the Exchequer should continue contributing to the preserved benefits section. While the review was in progress, the pension fund was able to distribute only the surplus on the contributory benefit section. That distribution was announced in June and comprised halving employee contributions, halving employer contributions, and a £2 per week improvement in pensions.

In July, as my hon. Friend correctly recorded, the Government decided to continue Exchequer funding of the preserved benefits section, releasing a further £285 million surplus for distribution. That was announced earlier this month and comprises an increase in pensions above that announced in May of £2 per week to £4 per week, or 15 per cent. of total pension, whichever is the higher. So the total £1,454 million surplus has been distributed in the following way. Forty one per cent. of it has gone in reducing employee contributions and providing other benefits for contributing members; 35 per cent. on a reduction in employer contributions; and 24 per cent. in improved pension benefits.

My hon. Friend appeared to argue that more or all of the surplus should be used to increase benefits. The arguments against, which have been deployed in correspondence to him from British Rail's chairman are, first, that the surplus is only partly the result of past contributions from pensioners. The majority can be ascribed to past contributions by the board and by members who have not yet retired and who are still contributing. Therefore, it is equitable that the board and contributing members should enjoy some of the benefit of the surplus.

Secondly, of the three parties to the scheme—the board, contributing members and pensioners—pensioners are in the most protected position, as their pensions are guaranteed. Therefore, the fund has discharged its responsibilities towards them, for they are in receipt of the pensions to which they contributed. The contributing members and the board have no such certainty. If, at a future date, the fund is unable to meet its liabilities, contributions will have to rise, or the value of pensions decrease.

Thirdly, the chairman of British Rail has argued that the pensioners are getting a good share of the surplus in the 24 per cent. that is being distributed.

It is quite usual for a pension fund surplus to be used in part to reduce future contributions. However, it may be misleading to think of the pensioners as owning all or part of the surplus. Strictly speaking, they have no rights to the surplus—in the same way as they have no obligation to meet any deficiency. It is true that the surplus arises, in part, because of higher than necessary contributions by contributing members in the past and that some of those members will now be pensioners, but if past contributions had been too low and a deficiency had arisen on the fund, the pensioners would not be required to pick up any share of it. It is the board and the contributing members who must make up any deficiency that arises.

The distribution of the surplus and the arrangements for representation are not subject to ministerial approval. The firm policy of this Government, and of previous Governments, is not to interfere in the running of the pension scheme. The scheme is the responsibility of the employer and the scheme members. I am bound, therefore, to say to my hon. Friend that there is no scope for me to intervene. However, I can make two suggestions to him, which I hope he will find helpful. First, he may wish, even at this late stage, to put any points that he may have to the Occupational Pensions Board to form part of its review. Secondly, he may wish to ask the British Transport Superannuitants Federation to put a case to British Rail for representation on the joint working party.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for this opportunity to respond to the debate. I have been unable to satisfy him in every way, but I hope that some of my remarks will have been helpful.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 25 November 1988

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FOURTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [22 November]

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Sir Giles Shaw.]*

Question again proposed.

Foreign Affairs and Defence

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Foreign Secretary, may I tell the House that a large number of right hon. and hon. Members are anxious to take part in the debate and ask for brief contributions?

9.35 am

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): It is five months since we had our last full-scale debate on foreign affairs. Today, as the House knows, we are to cover defence issues as well as foreign affairs, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence hopes to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, at the close of the debate. The fact that both topics are being considered together reminds me of the suggestion made by the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), that time should be more generously allocated to discussion of foreign affairs. That is an understandable point. I certainly will not be able to deal today with all the possible questions that might arise and my right hon. Friend's suggestion is still under consideration.

At our last debate I offered the House the opinion that the foreign policy climate had taken an undoubted turn for the better. Today one can go further than that. In the West, the European Community is pressing ahead with the revolution in the way its people live and do business. In the East, President Gorbachev is promoting a revolution of his own, the impact of which is being felt far beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. Together we are rediscovering the potential of some of the post-war institutions, perhaps most notably the United Nations.

In other words, we live in a time of great opportunity for constructive action by the United Kingdom in foreign affairs, of opportunity to shape the destiny of Europe as we approach 1992 and beyond, and of opportunity to shape the direction of what may be a new era in East-West relations.

If, then, we have reached a new beginning, it is one that Britain has helped to bring about. This Government have proved that they have the vision, capacity and will to build for the future. In foreign policy as in economic policy we have never hesitated to follow the course that we believe to be right. That has been true in our handling of arms control, the Community budget and Southern Africa, just as it was true when, as Chancellor, I confronted a large part of the economic establishment with the 1981 Budget and won my contest with the 364 long forgotten economists of that time.

So, too, with foreign policy. The lesson of the past decade is that Britain's influence in the world can grow and not forever retreat, as seemed inevitable with the Opposition. The Government's foreign policy rests upon a few simple and clear long-term objectives. We are determined to advance democracy, to defend freedom and to maintain and promote our prosperity. We shall defend our national interests and advance western values at the same time by being a reliable ally and trusted partner.

Our starting point is our place in Europe. The United Kingdom is an active and committed member of the European Community, which promotes democracy, enhances our competitive strength in world trade and plays a significant part in our prosperity.

Likewise, we are an active and committed member of NATO, the guarantor of our security. Through those organisations, we protect and promote our interests and determine our own destiny.

A moment ago, I said that we had helped to shape a new beginning in foreign affairs. In East-West relations —a topic on which the Foreign Affairs Committee is currently doing a great deal of work—we have consistently pursued a policy that combines strong defence with the search for dialogue, not dialogue for its own sake, but to get results.

After the years of confrontation following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it was, finally, the Soviet Union, under Mr. Gorbachev, which began to move towards our agenda. Notable successes have followed: the INF treaty; and the prospect of withdrawal from Afghanistan itself. Throughout that period, NATO has been fortified by the strength of our bilateral relationship with the United States. The Prime Minister and President Reagan have forged a bond which, as we saw last week in Washington, in its closeness and warmth, has been unprecedented since the war. The election of Vice-President Bush—we warmly congratulate him on his success—offers the prospect of welcome continuity in American policy.

Meanwhile, we look forward to President Gorbachev's third visit to the United Kingdom next month. Discussions with him are always lively, in marked contrast to those with his predecessors. On the occasions when I challenged Mr. Gromyko, for example, on any point of Soviet policy, the almost invariable consequence was the replaying of a well-worn record. I have a particular instance in mind—one of many. When I raised with him the all-too-familiar catalogue of human rights cases—many of them now

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

solved—his only response was to tell me that I was "lowering the tone of the conversation". There was no serious debate whatever.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm or deny whether, at the same meeting, representatives of the Soviet Government mentioned human rights abuses in this country and the number of people held in prison in Northern Ireland?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Absolutely not. The hon. Gentleman's question reveals just how little he has understood the purport of what I am saying. On other occasions when I have raised the question of human rights with Mr. Gromyko, he declined to comment at all. On that occasion, his contribution was remarkably generous, when he offered that one sentence and said that we were lowering the tone of our conversation. That was the character of the dialogue at the time—no serious debate at all.

With President Gorbachev and my opposite number Mr. Shevardnadze, we have established a real dialogue on the issues. It is refreshing to be able to explore, and often to diminish, our differences frankly and openly. Mr. Gorbachev has launched an historic process of political and economic reform in his country. His thinking has become more radical as he has come to realise the full extent of the overhaul that is needed. We welcome what Mr. Gorbachev is trying to do. If he succeeds, it will be an event of far-reaching importance for the Soviet Union and for the wider world. Surely we cannot be certain that he will succeed. His own country—from Tbilisi to Tallinn —is in ferment. The Soviet Union is not going to end up as a Western-style democracy. It is hard for Mr. Gorbachev to achieve democratic goals when the means at his disposal are essentially non-democratic. He wants to make the existing one-party system more efficient, not dismantle it.

We also have to face up to the fact that the Soviet Union will remain a military superpower. Soviet military might is a stark reality. The Soviet Union still spends at least 15 per cent. of its GNP on defence. Why does the Soviet Union need more than 5 million active members in its armed forces—as many as the entire population of Denmark? Why do the Russians still build twice as many tanks as NATO every year? What is it all for?

The Soviet Union claims that its force levels and deployments in Europe are purely defensive. Yet we see Warsaw pact forces superior in numbers and geared for offensive operations. The answer to that paradox lies in the facts—cold, simple facts. Without agreed facts, there can be no starting point for negotiations, no reliable verification, and no arms control agreements. We need the facts out in the open—facts that underpin our case and justify NATO's entire approach to arms control.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Surely the right hon. and learned Gentleman must know the history of the whole business. He must understand that, after the revolution in 1917, the Soviet Union was invaded by countries from the West, including our own. He must also be aware that, eventually, despite the agreement with Hitler for a short period, the Germans marched in against the Russians, and 20 million people were killed. In such circumstances, would not the right hon. and learned Gentleman be concerned about the future?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman made a point that I have made on many occasions, and it is important to concede it. But the two conflicts to which he referred —bloody and dreadful as were their consequences for the people of the Soviet Union—occurred decades ago. The points that he made show why we should be concerned about historial recollection in the Soviet Union. They do not show why, today, the Soviet Union, under its new dispensation, is still manufacturing twice as many tanks as the whole of NATO manufactures. They do not show why, today, the Soviet Union is still launching one new submarine every 37 days. They are the facts that we need to address in today's debate.

That is why I am glad to announce today that, as a result of a British initiative, the NATO allies are publishing—in this document—a new in-depth assessment of the balance of conventional forces in Europe. It is the most exhaustive analysis of the available data ever undertaken. The allies have concealed no detail of their own forces, and spared no efforts accurately to estimate the Warsaw pact forces.

The Warsaw pact may challenge our figures. My message to them—my message to President Gorbachev —is this: "Follow our example. Put your cards on the table. Face up."

Military glasnost is a prerequisite for successful arms control. The figures published today show that, despite the improved atmosphere of East-West relations, the balance has not improved in recent years. There is still an imbalance of three to one in the Warsaw pact's favour in tanks and artillery, and two to one in combat aircraft. The Soviet Union alone—I emphasise that—has more tanks and artillery in Europe than the whole of the rest of the Warsaw pact and NATO combined.

Faced with this huge conventional superiority, NATO cannot afford to abandon the policy of nuclear deterrence that has kept the peace for 40 years.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us, before its publication, whether the document will go beyond the kind of narrow bean counting that he has just been indulging in and whether it will involve the publication of net assessments of threat which, apparently, are available to the allies and to the Alliance, or will we get another version of Soviet military power in time for the Christmas fiction lists?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman's observations offer a tragically revealing insight into Opposition Members' approach to these matters. To describe the lethal comparison of Soviet military power with the rest of the military alliance as bean counting is to reveal the paucity of the hon. Gentleman's imagination and insight in the most catastrophic way.

The Labour party, as the hon. Gentleman's intervention and last month's Labour conference have confirmed, remains firmly shackled to unilateralism. Opposition Members fundamentally misunderstand or wilfully ignore the part that deterrence plays in our defence. Mr. Gorbachev, for all his talk of a nuclear-free world, is happy to leave unilateralism to somebody else. The Socialist Government of France would not dream of taking lessons from Labour. No nuclear power has ever given up its deterrent, nor would anybody follow us if we were to do so. That lesson has still not penetrated Opposition Members' minds.

It is vital that the West remains united in its approach to arms control. The Soviet Union can simply impose unanimity in defence matters on its Warsaw pact allies and on its own public opinion. In NATO, we have to build consensus. We have done so successfully in the past—for instance, over the difficult question of INF deployment. We must continue to do so when we face other difficult decisions—for instance, over nuclear modernisation.

Nine of the European members of NATO, now including Spain and Portugal, are members of the Western European Union. We believe that a stronger and more active WEU will strengthen NATO as well. We see a role for the WEU in the protection of out-of-area European security interests also. For example, we have led the WEU in co-ordinating common European naval patrols in the Gulf. The whole House will agree that our own Armilla patrol—still there—deserves our special thanks.

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): First, will the Secretary of State explain why the Prime Minister publicly opposed the entry of Spain into the WEU? Did he personally persuade her to change her mind? Secondly, if the Secretary of State regards the WEU as a possible pillar for Europe in NATO, does he accept that France, Germany and Belgium already disagree with Britain on the modernisation of tactical nuclear weapons in Germany?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to make his own speech on that topic.

Mr. Healey: Will the Secretary of State answer the question?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to conclude my generous remarks about him. His insight on this question is uncharacteristically at fault. I cannot put it more gently than that, and I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will agree with me.

Mr. Healey: Will the Secretary of State answer the question?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am delighted to see the right hon. Gentleman sitting like a bird perched on the Back Benches. I am sure that he agrees that vigilance and a strong defence remain crucial to the future of Western security.

We want further progress in arms control as well. Here, too, NATO has set the agenda of 50 per cent. cuts in United States and Soviet strategic nuclear arsenals, a global ban on chemical weapons and the elimination of conventional imbalances in Europe.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred to the prospects for the START negotiations in her speech on Tuesday. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence replies to the debate, he will emphasise the particular importance that we place on a chemical weapons ban with effective verification.

I shall now deal briefly with conventional arms control. I spent polling day in June 1987 at Reykjavik, and while I was there we were able to hammer out an agreed NATO position and an agreement that there should be talks on conventional stability. *[Interruption.]* I returned in time for the count and the result was never in doubt. It was agreed that talks on conventional stability—CST—and separate talks on confidence-building measures should both take place within the framework of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

We also agreed that the conventional stability talks should be confined to the 23 members of the Eastern and Western alliances, who would retain autonomy over the subject matter and procedure of those talks. We must stand by that agreement. NATO's overall objective for the talks is a stable and verifiable balance of conventional forces at lower levels.

At the Moscow peace forum in 1987, Mr. Gorbachev said that the right way to correct imbalances was for the side with the larger forces to make the reductions. Who can possibly disagree with that? The question now is whether the Soviet Union is ready to put those words into effect. We shall be putting that question squarely to the Warsaw pact at the Vienna CST meeting, and to Mr. Gorbachev when he visits London next month.

The Vienna meeting is not, however, just about military security. It is also about the kind of security that a citizen feels in a country where his human rights are respected. We want an agreement that strengthens respect for human rights.

When the Soviet Union first proposed some two years ago that a CSCE conference on human rights should be held in Moscow of all places, the reaction of Western delegations was one of sheer disbelief. But, in the time since that idea first surfaced, the Soviet human rights record has improved. It is now possible to begin to take the Soviet proposal seriously—so seriously, in fact, that we want to be sure that the proposed conference will genuinely advance the cause of human rights in the Soviet Union.

However, we are not prepared to take part in a propaganda showcase. If the Soviet Union wants the conference to take place it must provide clear evidence that it intends the improvement in its human rights record to be permanent, that it accepts that human rights must be respected as of right and that it will ensure open conditions for the holding of the conference itself. Not to set and insist on strict conditions of that kind would be to deny all the effort we have made over the years on behalf of those in the Soviet Union—and elsewhere—who are seeking their basic freedom.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): May I confirm, having recently been in Moscow, that my right hon. Friend's words will be welcomed by many of those whom we met there, who are most concerned that the West may agree too easily to a conference on human rights and who have considerable support for the Government's line?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks, which underline the importance of the point I have made.

We see no inconsistency between firm Western positions on security and human rights issues and our overall desire for better relations with the Soviet Union. The facts show that Western firmness has helped rather than hindered dialogue by establishing a clear framework within which both sides can work.

Our active engagement with the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe in recent years has been graphically illustrated by the highly successful visit to Poland of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It is the result, not of a cold war mentality, but of clear and consistent

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

policies, plainly spelt out in my own earlier visits to every East European capital. The Governments of the Soviet Union and of Eastern Europe know that we are a Government with whom they can do business.

It is fascinating to study the current processes of change in the East. It is easy to see where their economies have gone wrong and to prescribe a greater role for market mechanisms and individual enterprise, but it is much harder for them to take the tough economic decisions that are necessary without the political framework of elections and free speech. It is there that the East is still groping for the solution.

We are under no illusions. We cannot directly influence these developments, but we believe that our efforts to encourage cultural, political commercial and personal links will, in the long term, exert an influence and, by example, help the East to evolve in our direction.

I sometimes find myself wondering whether it will ever be possible for the Labour party to learn what the Communist world is fast acknowledging—that the free market works. There is another crucial difference. Unlike the Labour party here, in the Soviet Union, it is those who oppose new thinking who are being shed from the Politburo—what a contrast to the Labour party.

There is another contrast between the economic stagnation of Eastern Europe and the dynamism of the West. Through our membership of the European Community, we are helping to transform Europe's future. Today's European agenda has, in large measure, been set by Britain. The concept of the single market owes a great deal to our way of thinking and will revolutionise the way in which Europe does business. We have worked energetically with our partners to put in place more than 100 of the 300 measures for the single market envisaged in the 1985 White Paper.

We can work towards the completion of the single market because we have cleared many of the old problems from our agenda. Agricultural spending is now finally being brought under control, stocks are being reduced—sometimes dramatically—finances have been put in order and the structural funds have been reformed.

The Europe that Britain wants to see will be a Europe not just of growing prosperity but of growing political significance in world affairs and a force for stability, democracy and economic freedom. It will be a Europe open for business and open to the world, and both are important.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Secretary of State recall that when Mr. Delors made his famous forecast about 80 per cent. of our legislation stemming from Europe in 10 years' time, there was an immediate reaction from the Government and the media? Can he explain why, when I revealed in the House two weeks ago that the current rate was already 80 per cent., there was complete silence? The Government had to accept the unanimity of article 236 of the treaty of Rome in putting through the Single European Act. Will the Secretary of State undertake to accept full responsibility for any legal consequences which flow from that Act, particularly as it was put through the House on a guillotine and a three-line Whip?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I think that the House is more than glad to accept responsibility for that legislation, as it has done for the original legislation on accession to the European Community. The House had a full opportunity to debate the legislation, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

Mr. Spearing: No—it was guillotined.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The House had a lengthy and full opportunity to consider the legislation.

Mr. Spearing: It was guillotined.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Nevertheless, the House had a full and lengthy opportunity to consider the legislation, and the House endorsed it with a substantial majority. We are now working within the framework endorsed by the House. That includes the proposition that I have just set out, of a Europe that is open for business and a Europe, as the hon. Gentleman often emphasises, that is open to the world, because we want other countries to make their markets as open as we are determined that the European market shall be after 1992. The Community has already scored successes with the United States over the recent trade legislation and with Japan over the importation of Scotch whisky.

We want to build on those successes at the forthcoming mid-term meeting of GATT in Montreal. With our partners, we shall be seeking agreements of substance and of principle, not just empty declarations. In particular, in the GATT forum, we must register gains in the key area of agriculture. The Community has cut agricultural support and protection. We must do more, but our GATT partners must make similar efforts so that, between us, we can bring agriculture back closer to market realities.

From our place in Europe, Britain derives additional authority for the influence we bring to bear in the wider world. The Commonwealth remains a significant focus of our political, aid and trade relationship with more than 40 developing countries. In the United Nations, we have led the search for solutions to regional conflicts through the Security Council and, in particular, through renewed co-operation between the five permanent members of the Council.

We have, for example, secured the resumption, after an interval of many years, of meetings between the five Foreign Ministers at the time of the General Assembly. Much of the ground for these important meetings was prepared by Britain's ambassador in New York, Sir Crispin Tickell, who has led the co-operation between the five permanent representatives.

As I sat down in New York with my four colleagues and the Secretary-General this September for the second such meeting we were all, I think, conscious of the historic importance of the institution that we were helping to recreate. The founding fathers of the United Nations had intended it to be built upon co-operation between the five permanent members, but, almost from the outset, that role was never fulfilled. Now, after more than 40 arid years, there is a clear sense that we really are moving towards genuine co-operation. A combination of changed superpower relations, and a determinations to use the Security Council to solve real problems, offer hope of effective action on regional issues which threaten peace. The House needs no reminding that, as a permanent member of the Security Council, under this Government, Britain is playing her full part in those important developments.

The first fruit of such efforts has been a ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war, a year after the acceptance of resolution 598, which resulted from a British initiative. We support the efforts of the Secretary-General to negotiate the implementation in full of resolution 598. The House knows that we have recently agreed to restore full diplomatic representation with Iran. We did not take that step lightly, but we see it as a common-sense move as Iran emerges from a senseless war, apparently ready to rejoin the international community. Now is the right time to improve our channels of communication with a major power in the region.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The Foreign Secretary earlier mentioned the Armilla patrol. In view of what he has now said, is the continued presence of the Armilla patrol being kept under review? Is there any end to that patrol, in view of the cost to the British taxpayer and of the number of foreign vessels that have been flagged to take advantage of the British presence?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The matter is kept under review, as it has been throughout. I shall leave my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to deal with the specific points raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Heffer: What is the Government's attitude to, and what they have done about, the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds? This is a vital question to which we ought to know the answer.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The House is right to emphasise this point, and we have laid great emphasis on it ourselves. We have pressed for action in the Security Council. I raised the matter in my speech to the General Assembly. We have noted the response by the Iraqi Government that they are seeking to comply with international obligations, but we believe that the matter needs to be kept continuously on the international agenda. Therefore, we are supporting the important conference being convened in Paris in January on the proposal of the Presidents of United States and France about the 1925 Geneva convention on chemical weapons. The hon. Gentleman can remain assured that chemical weapons, and the particular example that he cites, remain a source of continuous preoccupation to Her Majesty's Government. It is a ghastly feature of today's world scene that those dreadful weapons should have re-emerged into active use anywhere on the face of the globe. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will have more to say about it later on.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot give way. I am now dealing with other aspects of this question.

The House will want to know, but will need no reassurance, that we have made no deals over our hostages in the Lebanon or the two British subjects imprisoned without trial in Iran. We have long been urging the Iranian authorities to release Mr. Nicola and Mr. Cooper and to do all in their power to help secure the release of our hostages. I raised these issues personally with Iranian Foreign Minister, Mr. Velayati, when I met him in New York in September. Prospects for the further development of our relations must certainly be affected by the Iranian approach to these questions.

The Gulf ceasefire has shown what a sustained international endeavour can achieve. A similar international effort is urgently needed to tackle the Palestine problem. Mr. Bush assured my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in Washington last week that he would make this one of his priorities. We look forward to discussing it also with Mr. Gorbachev next month.

Our position is clear and consistent. We believe that the only answer is a negotiated settlement based on the principles of security for all states and justice for all peoples in the region, including Palestinian self-determination. An international conference still offers the best framework for negotiations.

The recent meeting of the Palestine National Council in Algiers gives some grounds for hope. The apparent willingness of the PNC to accept an international conference on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 is a positive move, but ambiguities remain. The PNC has not moved as far as it will have to on renunciation of violence and explicit acceptance of Israel's right to exist. The declaration of a Palestinian state does not help to carry the matter forward. While recognising the movement that the Palestinians have made, we look to them to reinforce their more promising words with deeds.

It is high time for Israel, whose past policies have provoked the continuing Palestinian uprising, to move as well. Blanket rejection of Palestinian overtures is no answer. Each side must be prepared to make the other an offer it cannot refuse. Britain has been working consistently for a negotiated settlement, in co-operation with our EC partners. Our policy was reflected in the statement by Community Foreign Ministers earlier this week. The formation of a new Israeli Government offers a new opportunity. We will be ready to work with it to help Israel and her neighbours to obtain peace and security. I emphasise that the PNC decisions offer a good basis on which to build.

In another long-standing area of conflict, patient diplomacy has finally brought results. We warmly welcome the approval by the Cuban, Angolan and South African Governments of the Geneva agreement on a timetable for Cuban troop withdrawal. Namibian independence on the basis of UN Security Council resolution 435 is nearer now than at any time in the past 10 years. Patient, persistent and imaginative American diplomacy, ably managed by Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker, has brought results, and he deserves our thanks. We have given full support to the negotiations. The Soviet Union also played a constructive role during the talks. We very much welcome this positive example of United States-Soviet co-operation which could serve as a precedent for the resolution of other major regional problems.

We have confirmed our willingness to contribute to the United Nations transitional assistance group. As a permanent member of the Security Council, we shall have a special role in working for early implementation of resolution 435. With our Community and Commonwealth partners, we shall be ready to offer economic and other assistance to an independent Namibia. The main credit for the progress achieved must go to those who over the years have supported the unjustly derided policy of staying engaged. I see here an eloquent justification of our own

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

policy towards South Africa. The lesson is that engagement achieves much more than walking away from a problem.

I am confident, too, that there is increasing understanding in black African countries of our position. They know that we are worrying for an end to apartheid, which is a violation of basic human rights and human dignity. They know that we are working for the unconditional—I emphasise "unconditional"—release of Nelson Mandela, whose case my right hon. Friend the Minister of State raised again during her visit to South Africa last week. They know of our concern for other prisoners in South Africa, including the Sharpeville Six. We had repeatedly urged the South African authorities to reprieve them. Now they have done so, and we welcome it.

Those countries know, too, we are helping black Africans within South Africa and that we are working to strengthen the prosperity and stability of neighbouring countries—for example, through the civil assistance and military training that we supply to Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Our voice is a positive one aimed at alleviating, not exacerbating, a difficult situation. That is why we reject punitive sanctions, which would impoverish and abandon the very people whom we are seeking to help.

Today this country is in the vanguard of an international community that is on the move. Our foreign policy is coherent and effective. In East-West relations we have put the wasted years behind us. Historic opportunities are opening up. While safeguarding our own security, we are working for arms control and greater freedom in the East. In NATO we are a robust ally and in Europe we are a committed partner advocating bold steps to strengthen the Community. On the global stage and in the United Nations we are an informed and influential participant.

Wherever one looks, the story is the same. One sees Britain acting as a force for freedom, a dynamo of democracy, and a champion of common sense. That is the philosophy and the effect of our foreign policy today; and that is why I commend it to the House.

10.12 am

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): In the five months since the House last debated foreign affairs it cannot be said that the world situation has improved overall. It is true that there have been some encouraging developments. As the Foreign Secretary has said, Iran has at last accepted United Nations Security Council resolution 598, and there is a good possibility that the murderous Iran-Iraq war will come to an end after so many years of needless slaughter. I join the Foreign Secretary in paying tribute to the Armilla patrol and to the men in our minesweepers in the Gulf. I was most impressed by their dedication and morale when I visited them last year.

The election last week in Pakistan seems to have signalled a return to democracy in that country. We trust that a Government will shortly be formed which will reflect the will of the Pakistani people as expressed at the polls. Elsewhere, however, there are too few promising signs.

The Foreign Secretary spoke about human rights. All over the world we see invasions of and attacks on human rights. I was interested to note the change of tone by the Government on the possibility of participating in the human rights conference proposed by the Soviet Government in Moscow. Of course, we are well aware of the problems about human rights in the Soviet bloc and in other countries and we are anxious about them. Sometimes we get a response that is difficult to answer.

I was in Prague this week, and in talks at the Foreign Ministry and with the secretary of the Communist party there I raised the question of human rights in Czechoslovakia and specifically discussed the response with tear gas and water cannon to the demonstration in Wenceslas square only a few days ago. I made very clear the feelings of the Labour party on matters like that. In that discussion I found it difficult to justify the legislation in this country which criminalises demonstrations and marches and which takes away the rights of defendants. I also found it difficult to justify the censorship of television and radio and the pursuit of newspapers through the courts for which the Government have now become notorious.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: Not at the outset of my speech.

It is sad that little further progress has been made in central America. We trust that president-elect Bush will end any further attempt to fund the Contra terrorists and will bend his efforts towards helping the peace initiative of President Arias of Costa Rica. Our Government continue to play a negative role. I understand that the Under-Secretary of State is shortly to visit central America but that he is not to include Nicaragua in his itinerary. Is that correct, and, if so, why? With the exception of Costa Rica any central American country that he visits will be less democratic and more authoritarian than Nicaragua. Is he to bestow his benison on the death squads of El Salvador but not on those working for better health and higher standards of literacy in Nicaragua?

The Government's initial response to the hurricane disaster in Nicaragua was disgraceful and even now ought to be improved upon. It is about time that the Government pursued a positive policy towards the central American peace process and to the one country which, despite adverse developments, has taken more positive steps than any other to implement that peace process. Of course, we welcome the results of the plebiscite in Chile, but here again the vote of the people does not seem to have resulted in genuine respect for that verdict by the bloodstained President Pinochet. Will the Government put much-needed pressure on Chile to return to democracy; and, if not, why not?

The situation in South Africa remains dim and depressing. We are happy that unprecedented international pressure has won the reprieve of the Sharpeville six, although those innocent people still face long prison sentences, and that Paul Setlaba has gained a stay of execution. These are simply welcome candles in appalling gloom. Five more people were hanged yesterday; and Nelson Mandela, at the age of 70, has been in captivity for 26 years. Peaceful organisations working for change continue to be banned. The whole vile apparatus of apartheid remains in place setting the stage for ultimate bloodshed on a horrifying scale unless peaceful change can be achieved.

In the middle east hopes for peace negotiations have, for the time being, been extinguished by the folly and shortsightedness of the Israeli electorate. Faced with the deepest crisis in the history of the Israeli state and with the Intifada approaching its annivarsary and showing no sign of fading away and still less sign of being suppressed, however brutal the methods used against it, Israel is in danger of throwing away the greatest chance that it has ever had for a negotiated peace. Her Arab neighbours have shown their readiness for a settlement that will provide for Israeli security. That readiness has been confirmed by latest discussions with senior members of the Syrian Government in Damascus and with President Mubarak in London, as well as by all the further contacts that I have continued to have with other Arab Governments. It has also been confirmed by the remarkable declaration made this month by the Palestine National Council meeting in Algiers.

If the PNC has not yet gone all the way to making the statements demanded by Israeli politicians before they are willing to talk to the PLO—and I hope that they will—it has certainly gone so far in denouncing terrorism and in accepting a two-state solution that it is now incumbent on Israel to respond in a positive manner. The problem for Israel is that, instead of being able to take initiatives, all it can do now is to respond or fail to respond to the initiatives of others.

The quarrelsome and divided Israeli electorate has turned away from the prospect of peace and, instead, created the prospect of a narrow, bigoted Israeli Government who would be expansionist abroad and, at home, would corrupt the dream of a Jewish homeland into a fundamentalist, Khomeinistic ghetto. The only hope for a sane and peaceful Israel now rests with the Labour party of Shimon Peres. I hope that the Israeli Labour party will ponder carefully before considering any coalition with Likud that would be based on a rejection of the peace process for which Shimon Peres fought so courageously up to and including the election campaign.

In the dialogue between the super-powers, which we greatly welcome, progress seems to have stalled since the Moscow summit. When I had discussions with Mr. Frank Carlucci, the United States Secretary of Defence, not long ago, he indicated to me that there were hopes of a START treaty by the end of the first half of 1989. I very much hope that those hopes will be fulfilled and that there will also be progress in the Vienna talks so that we can look forward to a breakthrough on conventional arms reductions. As the Soviet Union has publicly acknowledged asymmetry in conventional forces in favour of the Warsaw pact, such progress should be more likely.

Faced with such challenges, the British Government have scope for a major and constructive role. We may not be a super-power, nor any longer a major world power, but we are an important regional power which, alone among other significant regional powers, has unparalleled influence through membership of the United Nations Security Council, the Commonwealth, the European Community, NATO and the economic summit. We are the only country in the world to be at the centre of all those intersecting circles, yet the influence available to us is mostly unused and, where used, mostly misused.

Mr. Spearing: I wholeheartedly agree with the sentiments of my right hon. Friend, but does he agree that he is underestimating the potential of Great Britain in this respect? Is it not true that we are also the cultural and constitutional centre of the English language and of many democratic institutions throughout the world, that we have an unparalleled advantage in our language and that we would have used our world service and educational institutions to further the aims of peace and concord in the world if the Government had not squandered the opportunities given by both?

Mr. Kaufman: I fully agree with my hon. Friend. Wherever I travel in the world and to whomever I speak, whether in eastern Europe, the Arab countries or all the other places that I visit, I find that the greatest source of objective, genuine information that is valued in those countries is the BBC's world service. The British Council is also greatly valued. I very much hope that the Government will give every support both to the BBC world service and to the British Council because of the great good that they do for the British reputation throughout the world.

I certainly do not blame the Foreign Office or the Foreign Secretary for this lamentable state of affairs. Neither the Foreign Secretary nor his Department has demonstrated any overall cohesive view nor a comprhensive and consistent approach to world affairs, yet the Foreign Office is a remarkable repository of expertise.

From my own experience, I regularly see how hard those in our overseas posts work, and so often with such excellent intentions. I should like to take this opportunity of thanking them and those in the Foreign Office here in London, together with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's private office, for all the trouble to which they go to assist with my overseas visits. I should also like to thank the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of State.

It is not the fault of our foreign service that Britain's influence in the world in practice is so much less than it could be, when it could be so substantial. It is the fault of the shadow Foreign Secretary. I do not here refer to myself, but to the shadow that looms over the Foreign Office from the building that faces it on the other side of Downing street—the shadow of the most interfering, meddlesome, negative and baneful Prime Minister with whom the Foreign Office has ever had to put up. If we read the memoirs of Lord Carrington, published only a few weeks ago, we see what hatred the Prime Minister has for the Foreign Office—it emerges from page after page of that lengthy book—and what damage she inflicts on the morale of the Foreign Office.

In almost 10 years the Government have only two achievements to their name in overseas affairs—the negotiations that led to the independence of Zimbabwe and the agreement with China on Hong Kong. They are both achievements entirely of the Foreign Office. Lord Carrington makes clear in his book that the Rhodesia settlement went completely against the instincts of the Prime Minister. She had to be talked into it. It is common knowledge that the remarkable achievement of the Foreign Office on Hong Kong was almost wrecked by the ignorance and arrogance of the Prime Minister.

The right hon. Lady goes marauding around the world, ever alert for the pop of a flashbulb. Her overseas travels are one long quest for the next photo opportunity. Tacitus said of the Romans, "Where they make a desert, they call it peace." The record in foreign affairs of the Prime Minister can be found not in the *Stateman's Year Book*, but in the Thatcher family photograph album. There is not

[Mr. Kaufman]

a spot on earth that she has visited which is happier, better off or more peaceful as a result of her frenzied sojourn. Indeed, the record of havoc or broken hopes that she leaves behind is appalling.

When the Prime Minister visited Canada, she instructed the voluble Mr. Bernard Ingham to brief the press offensively and inaccurately against the Canadian Government. This month she went further and caused offence in Canada without even visiting the place. Her remarks in the United States led the leaders of both Opposition parties in Canada to complain that she was treating their country as though it were a colony.

The Prime Minister went to Turkey this year, proclaiming before she set out that she would bring back with her the contract for the new Bosphorus bridge. She declared,

> "Building bridges is one purpose of my visit."

Click, click went the cameras, but Britain lost the contract for the second bridge to the Japanese, and there is no sign of a contract for the third bridge for Britain.

The Prime Minister went to Poland and lectured the Government there on what she called having

> "a real dialogue with representatives of all sections of society, including Solidarity"—

that from a Prime Minister who never has a dialogue with any section of society in this country, most especially not with her Cabinet.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman may for a moment bask in what little he can bask in—namely, the amusement of his hon. Friends at these absurd observations—but he may like to acknowledge the fact that one of the principal tasks of the Foreign Secretary is to fend off the immense torrent of invitations for the Prime Minister to visit countries, from Poland to Canada. She is recognised throughout the world as a formidable statesman of world stature, whereas the Leader of the Opposition is not recognised even in the countries that he does visit.

Mr. Kaufman: That was lovely, but one of the real jobs of the Foreign Secretary, as I shall have cause to describe in a few moments, is fending off the damage that the Prime Minister does and doing his best to explain it away when it has been done.

Protected by General Jaruzelski's police, the Prime Minister went to Gdansk. She is safer in Gdansk than she is in Gorton. Poles who know little of her, will tolerate her, but my constituents would give her a different reception. However, she does not dare to visit and prate to them as she does to people who live too far away to know much about her. She visited workers who were trying to prevent a shipyard closure when she has been responsible for the closure of most shipyards in Britain. Indeed, she forced a censure vote in this House against the Labour Government's shipbuilding deal with Poland. I stood there and had to defend it.

Mr. Brazier: As someone who worked a number of years as a consultant to the shipbuilding industry, I find it odd that anyone on either side of the House should say that the decline in shipbuilding throughout Europe is the responsibility of one person. Is the right hon. Gentleman unaware of the fact that shipbuilding throughout the world is shrinking and is in recession?

Mr. Kaufman: The chairman of British Shipbuilders, who was appointed by the Government, paid tribute to the Labour Government and to me for saving the shipbuilding industry by bringing it into public ownership. The Government have brought about a situation in which the merchant shipbuilding force has almost disappeared. The hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) may be a consultant, but the workers in the shipyards—those who remain—know the truth, which is that the Government are the greatest enemy of shipbuilding. We could never have won the Falklands war without the dedicated work of British shipbuilding workers, especially on the Tyne.

The Prime Minister placed a wreath on a monument to strikers when she visited Gdansk. In Britain, the same strikers would have been penalised by her trade union legislation. She offered her sympathy to workers who are fighting for the recognition of trade union right[illegible] Poland, when she is sacking and victimising Government employees in Britain for the specific "offence" of trade union membership.

On this subject, Mr. Jerzy Milewski, the director of the office abroad of Solidarity, said:

> "Solidarity totally supports the call by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, to which it is affiliated, for the immediate reinstatement of the dismissed workers and the full restoration of trade union rights at GCHQ.
>
> We appreciate the British Government's stand on trade union rights in Poland and their support for Solidarity. But the British Government's legitimate concern and welcome sympathy for our struggle could only gain greater authority if they applied the same standards to British workers."

He expressed full support for the British Trades Union Congress and its action, and said:

> "They have been with us in the most difficult moments of our independent union's life and they can be sure of the support of Polish workers in their fight for freedom of association."

The Prime Minister told the House a few days ago that Solidarity is different from British trade unions and represents what she called

> "the only expression of opposition to Communism and Socialism in Poland."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1988; Vol. 140, c. 167.]

It is clear that the Prime Minister knows nothing about Solidarity. In his autobiography, "A Path of Hope," Lech Walesa makes it clear that he does not want Solidarity to be a political opposition in Poland and that he supports a Socialist Government for Poland. In response to the Prime Minister's statement that he expresses opposition to Socialism in Poland, Lech Walesa said:

> "We're in the process of working out a Polish style of Socialism . . . For the great majority of people, socialism boils down to things we are accustomed to, which we pay no more attention to than the blood circulating in our veins: social benefits, hospitals, schools and so on—the basic essentials . . . all that is best in the economy and in the domain of social welfare is socialism".

That is what Lech Walesa says when he refers to the elements of social benefits which the Government are destroying in Britain and for which proper trade unionism stands.

Mr. Walesa, in his book, specifically states that the aim of Solidarity is to win the right to negotiate on pay and conditions and the right to partcipate in decision-making in the workplace. Those are the proper rights of a trade union anywhere, but rights which the Prime Minister detests and tramples on in Britain. The Prime Minister went to Gdansk to cash in on Mr. Welesa's popularity, without having the faintest understanding of or sympathy for the concepts for which he really stands.

The Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]* I invite hon. Members to read the book. The Prime Minister does not care about democracy or human rights. She cares instead about being photographed with popular people. The right hon. Lady does not even have to start out on her travels to cause trouble and offence. Last week, the talkative Mr. Bernard Ingham briefed Lobby correspondents about the Prime Minister's plans for a visit to Africa. In Africa, millions are starving and thousands are dying in bloodshed through avoidable wars. Mr. Ingham told journalists nothing about the Prime Minister's plans to try to remedy both kinds of tragedy. Instead, the main item in his briefing was that the Prime Minister would use the trip to pay off a score against the President of Zambia through an act of petty spite.

The Prime Minister does not have to contemplate foreign travel of her own to cause serious damage. The press is still full of reverberations about Mr. Ingham's briefing of journalists a week ago on the Prime Minister's wish to ban a visit by the Queen to the Soviet Union. It is natural for the Prime Minister, following her pseudo regal progress through Russia last year, to wish to conceal from the Soviet people and their Government that we in Britain have a genuine and extremely popular monarch and that the Prime Minister herself is only a jumped-up and impertinent pretender. The problem is that the Prime Minister's court is a good deal more presumptuous and arrogant than anyone connected with Buckingham palace could ever be. It is time that that gang of placemen were put thoroughly in their place.

There is no doubt that Mr. Ingham gave that briefing. Why did he give that briefing? With whose authority did he give that briefing? What is to be done about Mr. Ingham having given that briefing? I do not expect the Foreign Secretary to know the answers. As so often, the right hon. and learned Gentleman was left in the dark. When questioned about this murky affair in Brussels, this is the way in which he dolefully responded:

> "I have not had an opportunity to study this question and I have not been in London in the last few days. I do not want to comment on this. If you want a comment, you had better ask them in London. You had better talk to London."

What a humiliation for the Foreign Secretary, who should be providing advice for the palace on such an issue. Instead, he is put in the shade by the people in 10 Downing street, who care so little for the office of Foreign Secretary.

Then there was the Prime Minister's visit to Bruges. The Foreign Secretary spoke a good deal about the Community, but for some reason which escapes me he did not refer to the Prime Minister's speech to the college of Europe on 20 September. I wish to put some detailed question to the right hon. and learned Gentleman about the speech, and I shall readily give way to allow him to answer each one. In her speech, the Prime Minister said that she is against

> "decisions . . . taken by an appointed bureaucracy."

Does the Foreign Secretary agree with that? If so, how does he reconcile it with the provision in the Single European Act, which adds to EEC treaty article 145, on powers of the Commission, a provision to confer further implementing powers on the Commission? The Commission is, of course, the Community's appointed bureaucracy. The Single European Act is now embedded in United Kingdom law through the European Communities (Amdt) Act 1988, which the Foreign Secretary guillotined to allow it to pass through Parliament.

At Bruges, the Prime Minister said that she is opposed to a European superstate. Does the Foreign Secretary agree with that? If so, how does he reconcile it with the provision in the Single European Act, which is now United Kingdom law because of the European Communities (Amendment) Act, which commits participants, including the United Kingdom, to transform relations among the member states into a European union? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree with the Prime Minister's insistence in Bruges on the need to preserve individual members' parliamentary powers? If so, how does he reconcile that with the provisions in the Single European Act to draw up by the end of 1992 an inventory of relevant national laws not yet harmonised and submit appropriate proposals?

Does the Foreign Secretary agree with the Prime Minister that

> "it is a matter of plain common sense that we cannot totally abolish frontier controls"?

If so, how does he reconcile that with the provision in the Single European Act for the Community, by the end of 1992, to comprise an area without internal frontiers?

Does the Foreign Secretary agree with the Prime Minister's opposition to what she called, in her Bruges speech, "power centralised in Brussels"? If so, how does he reconcile that with the provisions in the Single European Act that introduce majority voting, partly or wholly, into six articles of the EEC treaty at present requiring unanimity for action, and which provide for majority voting in five of the new supplementary articles?

How does the Foreign Secretary reconcile that with the commitment to ensure balanced progress by qualified majority and with the commitment to replace unanimity in the EEC treaty article 59(2)? As Mark Antony said in "Julius Caesar",

> "I pause for a reply."

Mr. Tony Banks: The Foreign Secretary is not even listening.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Come on, get up and answer.

Mr. Kaufman: The Foreign Secretary's lack of response is interesting.

Itemised, one by one, every one of the major issues to which the Prime Minister says she is opposed is embedded in British law. They were opposed by the Opposition, but they were forced upon this country by the use of the guillotine. Yet the Foreign Secretary has nothing to say and can only accept the yawning gap between the words of the Prime Minister and the truth of the matter.

We have the right to state our reservations and objections to these matters. We fought the legislation through the House, and it was guillotined because we did so. How does the Prime Minister purport to oppose for Britain what she ordered her parliamentary majority to impose on Britain? It is no wonder that the West German newspaper *Die Zeit* pronounced the Prime Minister as hypocritical. Nowhere else has that hypocritical attitude been more plainly manifest than in the areas of defence and disarmament. On Tuesday, the Prime Minister boasted that

[Mr. Kaufman]

> "the defence budget will grow by nearly £1 billion a year over the next three years."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1988; Vol. 142, c. 27.]

That is the measure of the Government's determination to ensure that our forces have the most modern and up-to-date equipment, both nuclear and conventional. Yet that cash increase masks a reduction in defence expenditure in real terms. It is certain that there will be a reduction in real terms in 1989-90. In 1990-91 and 1991-92, there will be further reductions unless inflation falls to 3·5 and then to 3 per cent. Yet inflation now stands at 6·4 per cent.

That brings me to another question for the Foreign Secretary. Perhaps he will answer this one because he has pointed out that, as well as holding his current post, he was once Chancellor of the Exchequer. During the Prime Minister's manic visit to Australia, she encountered a very rare Antipodean species. I refer not to a wallaby or a koala, but to a television interviewer who did not treat her with sycophantic self-abasement. It was Mr. Kerry O'Brien who had the cheek to pull up the Prime Minister when, letting her true sympathy for apartheid show through, she talked about the "small amount of poverty" in South Africa.

Discussing inflation with Mr. O'Brien, the Prime Minister said that inflation in Britain, then at 4·6 per cent., was

> "not as low as I would wish".

She then went on to declare:

> "I should be very surprised if it got up to about seven."

Can the former Chancellor confirm that statement by the Prime Minister and assure the House that inflation in Britain will definitely not rise to 7 per cent.? After all, in Australia the Prime Minister said that that would not happen.

Even if the Foreign Secretary can give us that assurance —although, once again, he is failing to respond to a very simple question—it is clear that, even on the Prime Minister's own boast, spending on defence in Britain will fall in real terms over the next three years and that, because of the pointless, wasteful and irrelevant expenditure on Trident, expenditure on conventional defence—which should be our real contribution to NATO—will fall substantially.

It therefore makes especial sense for Britain to play an active and constructive role in conventional disarmament talks. We are simply not playing such a part, and we have actually been obstructing those talks. Once again, the responsibility lies with the Prime Minister. When I met the United States Defence Secretary, Mr. Carlucci, for talks in Washington three months ago, we discussed these issues. I asked him why the West had not accepted the proposals by Mr. Yazov of the Soviet Union for an exchange of data, and Mr. Carlucci replied:

> "You don't want to get me in trouble with Mrs. Thatcher, do you?"

I took down those words on his own Defence Department pad in his office. Mr. Carlucci said that he was ready to exchange published data. What the Foreign Secretary has announced today, with such a flourish, is not an exchange of data, but merely unilateral assessment.

The Prime Minister, obstructive on conventional disarmament, is positively destructive on nuclear disarmament. Wholly misunderstanding the role of battlefield nuclear weapons, she demands modernisation as a means of deterrence. By that stance, she shows that her real aim is to nullify the INF treaty, which is removing from Britain the cruise missiles to which she is so attached.

The Foreign Secretary said today that the West should remain united on arms control, but the West is not united on that issue. The Prime Minister is at serious odds with West Germany, as emerged clearly during my visit to Bonn a few weeks ago when I had discussions with Herr Genscher, the Foreign Minister, and Herr Scholz, the Defence Minister. There is also, of course, the opposition of the Belgians to modernisation. Chancellor Kohl of West Germany made it clear that he is opposed to any modernisation that would be a way around INF—*[Interruption.]* Oh, yes. Herr Genscher and Herr Scholz made it clear to me—I have published this and it has been accepted by the West German Government—that they do not regard modernisation as justified before it is necessary and that they regard battlefield nuclear weapons as a provocation to war rather than a protection against it. That is what those members of the Federal Government said to me, together with Herr Schäuble, who is the head of the Federal Chancellery. They do not regard any of those weapons as a deterrent.

Opposed to conventional disarmament, obstructive on NATO land-based nuclear arms, the Prime Minister stands clutching her so-called independent nuclear deterrent, the Trident missile, which she leases from the United States at massive cost and which can be serviced only by six day's journey across the Atlantic to King's Bay, Georgia, where every tiny spare part is kept. While she struts about the world stage like a Walter Mitty with megalomania, the poor old Foreign Secretary—now repudiated as her potential successor—is left to pick up the pieces.

The Prime Minister dismissed the notion of a common European currency. The Foreign Secretary, in his speech to the Kangaroo Group in Paris earlier this month, called for

> "further practical concrete steps to greater currency stability"

in the context of an attack on the wastefulness of 12 different Community currencies. The Prime Minister attacks every major consequence of 1992. The Foreign Secretary pleads that we should regard 1992 as good news. The Prime Minister attacks the abolition of frontiers. The Foreign Secretary rejoices over what he calls "a barrier-free Europe", giving

> "new dynamism to the Community."

Going around trying to smooth out the offence that the Prime Minister causes wherever she goes and to sort out the confusion that she creates, our Foreign Secretary—who is in charge of one of the best Foreign Offices and Diplomatic Services in the world—has been reduced by the Prime Minister to the role of the man who comes along with the shovel at the end of the Lord Mayor's procession.

There are major opportunities for Britain and we could play a worthwhile and constructive role. Given the chance, the Foreign Secretary would do his best to play that role. Let him, at long last, stand up to the Prime Minister and assert his authority as a senior Secretary of State. If he does that, he will have the support of the Opposition.

10.49 am

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): I suppose that we all agree that it is the duty of an Opposition to oppose, but the bitterness and waspishness of the attack of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) on the Prime Minister can be explained only by his sense of frustration at eight years in opposition.

The map of the world is undergoing great changes. We do not have many debates on foreign affairs, but this is an opportunity for constructive thinking. I hope that we shall have a more generous and constructive expression of views from the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), if he succeeds in catching your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I shall, however, take up the remarks about Europe made by the right hon. Member for Gorton and add to the debate that has arisen since the speech of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in Bruges. Nobody could doubt the commitment of the Government and of my right hon. Friend to Europe and European union. Our economy, security and role in the world depend on it. That is clear, and even the Labour party is coming round to recognising that our destiny lies in European union.

The debate has been over simplified in the press as one between inter-Government union and federation. There has never been any serious question of a European federation in the sense that the United States is federal. Our own experience points to that. At the beginning of the century, the British Government tried to create a federation of the self-governing parts of the British empire. They proposed an imperial Government, a customs union and an imperial navy. The people of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the two smaller South African colonies were most loyal and affectionate. But they turned down the proposal because, after 50 years of self-government they had acquired a sense of nationhood that forbade them accepting the federal proposal. Hon. Members cannot tell me that ancient and famous countries such as Britain, France, Spain and Germany will be corralled into an imitation of the constitution drawn up by Alexander Hamilton for the almost uninhabited United States where there were still almost as many Red Indian tribes and buffaloes as there were European settlers.

But there is a constitutional issue at stake—the relationship between Ministers and the European Commission. It is not a crisis but a European version of "Yes, Minister". There has always been a certain tension, as any of us who have held office will know, between a Minister and his officials. In private the officials often regard themselves as the real Government and regard the Ministers as the tribunes and public relations officers who are supposed to put across the Departments' views. There is a problem here. The real Government, in so far as we have an embryo Government of Europe, are the Council of Ministers.

As the right hon. Member for Gorton has said, the Commission is the bureaucracy. It is important for the Council of Ministers to keep the Commission in its place. I do not mean that Mr. Delors is a super "Sir Humphrey", but it is important that the Ministers should make their supremacy clear. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's speech may have been abrasive, but it delighted most of her ministerial colleagues on the Continent—at any rate, that is the impression that I have formed from talks with some of them.

Having expressed strong support for my right hon. Friends general view that the Council of Ministers' supremacy must prevail, I have one or two reservations about the speech she made in Bruges and to which the right hon. Member for Gorton has drawn attention. Is it really necessary to say that we must maintain border and customs control after 1992? Before 1914, there were virtually no border controls in Europe and one could travel almost anywhere in Europe, except in Turkey and Tsarist Russia, without a passport. Since we were a free trade country, we hardly bothered with Customs. We look a bit silly now talking about border controls against terrorism and drugs when the one open border in the United Kingdom is the border with the Irish Republic where many sympathisers of the IRA live. We should reconsider that matter.

The single currency is a long way away, but here again we should reflect on the past. For a long time we had a single currency in Europe in the form of gold. One could travel anywhere; and gold coins, the sovereign, the napoleon and the German gold mark were interchangeable.

In 1931 we had another limited experience of a single currency when we went off gold and created the sterling area. Although not all of the currencies in the sterling area had the same parities, there was virtually a single currency between them; and that currency, which became a reserve currency, was accepted, second only to the dollar, by the world until the 1960s.

I am not sure that we need a central bank to have a single currency. There was not a central bank for gold and, although the Bank of England acted as a reserve bank for the sterling area, it was not the only issuing house and it did not own the reserves which other sterling area countries pooled there.

Let me say something in parentheses. Hardly a month goes by without one of my right hon. Friends recommending the privatisation of something now in Government ownership. There is always some new privatisation plan, whether it is for water or electricity, or whatever, but I have never heard anyone suggest the privatisation of the Bank of England. Yet the German Bundesbank and the federal reserve bank of the United States are virtually privatised—or are at least independent of Government. Would it make things easier for the Government to contemplate a reserve bank for Europe if the Bank of England were privatised?

We must remember that the emerging European constitution will inevitably be outward-looking because all of us, in different ways, have close links with countries outside the European Community. The old imperial powers—France, Britain, Spain and Portugal—have close links with other parts of the world—North America, Latin America and Africa. The Germans still have hopes of reunification. None of us wants to see a tight, little western Europe—it should be outward looking. Already countries not yet in the Community are thinking about applying for membership, the Austrians are interested and also even Finland.

As the Soviet empire in Europe loosens up, the Community may well become a magnet to which countries such as Hungary and the Danube valley countries may be attracted. They know that the Soviet Union is incapable of giving them the necessary economic support to redeem their poverty. It is not surprising if they look towards the Community as a source of investment and funds.

We have travelled a long way since the idea of a united Europe was first launched in 1946. We are attempting something which has never been attempted before. Many people have tried to unite Europe by force, but this is the first time that an attempt has been made to do it with the free consent and will of those involved. It is not an easy

[Mr. Julian Amery]

task. We have certain uniting traditions, such as the classical traditions of Greece and Rome and the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but we also face some formidable difficulties which are not easy to overcome.

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 5 (Friday sittings).*

Nurses (Dispute)

11 am

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take to end disruption in the Health Service following the breakdown of talks through ACAS.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): That is in the hands of the trade unions, particularly the two unions that are attempting to organise industrial action. I regret that they made it clear in the talks at ACAS that they were unwilling to end industrial action and seeking to reopen the basis on which the regrading exercise was carried out. That exercise has been completed and the largest real pay rise for nurses and midwives in the history of the National Health Service will be in this month's pay cheques. The majority of nurses and midwives will receive all their back pay in December.

The overwhelming majority of nurses and midwives are working normally. Although there can be no question of reopening the basis of the new career structure, I shall discuss remaining issues with the Royal College of Nursing at its request on 5 December. I am not prepared to talk to NUPE and COHSE unless they call off their attempts to organise industrial action.

Mr. Cook: Is the Secretary of State aware that last night I, with other hon. Members, met all members of the nurses' staff side, including the unions and the royal colleges? Does he accept that, contrary to the statement that he has just made to the House, all members of the staff side made it plain that they had been willing to call off all industrial action if the management side had been willing to enter into discussions on the points in dispute? Why does he not admit that the talks broke down yesterday because the management side refused to enter into talks even if industrial action was called off, and made it clear that in doing so it was acting on ministerial instruction.

Does the Secretary of State accept that the representative of the RCN made it plain yesterday that the college went to ACAS only because the other unions were willing to call off industrial action, and described the management response as a kick in the teeth? Does he accept that all members of the staff side, including the royal colleges, informed us last night that it will now be difficult for each of them to restrain their members from industrial action? Is he really prepared to do nothing when what should have been an historic improvement in the nursing structure degenerates into a major crisis of morale in the wards and disruption in the hospitals?

Will the Secretary of State concede that the guidelines on supervision and responsibility were not part of the April agreement and have never been negotiated? If he is so confident that he is right in this guideline, why has he refused the invitation of all unions, including the royal colleges, to submit that to binding arbitration? Why is he so afraid to take a second opinion on his unilateral interpretation?

Will the Secretary of State confirm the extraordinary letter that he sent me yesterday in which he admitted that two letters from the general secretary of COHSE had not been replied to by him due to "a clerical oversight"? How does he expect the nurses in our wards to take seriously his lectures on the need for commitment to the job from them when he is so incompetent in running his office that he twice loses a letter from a leader representing 150,000 nurses? Does he not understand that our Health Service is fated to experience mounting disruption so long as it is in the hands of a Secretary of State who, since his appointment, has never met the leaders of the nurses who work in the wards and who now makes it a point of pride to snub them?

Mr. Clarke: In answer to the hon. Gentleman's first point about the decision of the various trade unions, I can do no better than to quote from a statement issued this morning by Mr. Trevor Clay on behalf of the RCN——

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): From Korea?

Mr. Clarke: From Korea. That is right. A statement was also issued in London by Mrs. Gillian Sandford. Mr. Clay, the general secretary of the RCN, said:

> "Perhaps it is time the other unions recognised that the RCN does not regard industrial action as negotiable. ACAS provided a way back into the discussions and they"—

the trade unions—

> "have chosen not to take it.

Mr. Dobson: That is right.

Mr. Clarke: If the hon. Gentleman will not accept that, perhaps he will accept what Gillian Sandford said. She stated:

> "The RCN meeting with Kenneth Clarke to discuss the problems in the clinical grading dispute is going ahead on 5 December. As we have warned, industrial action will not take us forward. Patients are already being affected. The RCN is not surprised by the outcome. We believed that the ACAS route was worth the effort. We now know that the courage to call off industrial action is not strong in the other unions despite everyone recognising that it is a dead end."

I shall meet the RCN on 5 December at its request when I hope that we can make reasonable progress.

As the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) made clear, COHSE and NUPE wish to discuss the basis on which the exercise has been conducted, particularly for untrained auxiliary nurses, and he wishes us to take that to arbitration. Some, but not many auxiliary nurses are taking part in industrial action of a kind which the unions are trying to foment. They wish to discuss a complete reinterpretation of the grading for the auxiliaries who have all received a pay increase of between 7·6 per cent. and 9·4 per cent.—a little under £500.

The meaning that the unions are now attempting to put on grade A would, in effect, abolish it because they argue that to work under supervision means that a trained nurse must be present and watching an auxiliary when making a bed, taking a patient to the lavatory or any other such duty. They want to move all those nurses on to a grade which will give them up to £1,500 a year more, which would be a 33 per cent. pay increase. The unions are prepared to foment industrial action by misleading their members into believing that that is properly their due.

It is not usual to have exchanges across the Floor during industrial disputes, but occasionally they take place. Exchanges are not always helpful, and the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party are not trying to be helpful. They are taking every opportunity to encourage industrial action, which is not widespread in our hospitals. That is plainly his approach today.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman descended from the sublime to the ridiculous by raising the embarrassing matter of the handling of correspondence. I have apologised to the hon. Gentleman and Hector MacKenzie. Indeed, I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out to me in a radio interview that these letters had been received. It was a clerical oversight because Mr. MacKenzie's letters had been diverted into the part of my Department which deals with routine correspondence from the public, and I must admit that the Department had not been dealing with it with excessive speed. The moment I discovered the letters I replied to them. *[Interruption.]* They merely told the general secretary what he already knew from our public exchanges, which was that I was not prepared to have discussions with trade unions while they were attempting to organise industrial action against patients in hospitals throughout the country. That remains our position.

Sir Barney Hayhoe (Brentford and Isleworth): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there is no justification for members of COHSE and NUPE taking industrial action now which is damaging to patients? Does he agree that it is a searing indictment of the Labour party that it seems to be more intent on encouraging such action in the interests of its own sordid politics than on being concerned with patient care? Does he agree that in the interests of patient care the Labour party should urge its friends in those unions to get back to work and to settle the outstanding differences in discussions with the Department?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my right hon. Friend. Opposition spokesmen have made no attempt to condemn industrial action against patients. They have taken the reverse view. A spokesman for the Opposition has deliberately visited hospitals where he has discovered, from the newspapers, that action is taking place, with the obvious intention of encouraging more people to join it. That is an irresponsible approach to the well-being of patients.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Does the Secretary of State accept that many nurses have no desire to take industrial action but have a real sense of grievance about the results of the grading procedure? Should not their sense of responsibility be rewarded by sympathetic consideration? If not, there is a serious risk of provoking a long-lasting crisis in the National Health Service.

Mr. Clarke: I agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman, and I accept that many nurses and midwives have been disappointed. There was bound to be disappointment when some nurses and midwives discovered that they were on lower grades as compared with colleagues with more skill and responsibility who are receiving spectacular increases. Unfortunately, some unions have made no attempt to explain to their members the basis upon which the grading was carried out. They have encouraged nurses to appeal who plainly have been graded correctly, with the result that the appeals system must deal with thousands of cases.

I am prepared to discuss with the Royal College of Nursing, and any other organisation that calls off industrial action, ways in which the appeals procedure can be operated so that legitimate grievances are dealt with fairly and in a civilised fashion. I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for making it plain that his party supports that view.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that at a time when, because of their economic success, the Government have been able to devote billions of pounds to expanding the Health Service, with £2·2 billion promised for next year and nearly £1 billion devoted this year to an historic pay rise for the nurses, a minority of nurses, the leaders of COHSE and NUPE and the Opposition parties are making so much political trouble that you, Mr. Speaker, have been persuaded to allow a private notice question—*[Interruption.]*—in the middle of a debate on foreign affairs and defence——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are in the middle of a debate on foreign affairs, and hon. Members should ask questions of the Secretary of State, not of me.

Mr. Whitney: It was not a question to you, Mr. Speaker. I was pointing out that, despite all those resources being made available, the political noise that is being made calls into question the fundamental structure of the National Health Service which Aneurin Bevan forced through the Labour party in 1946. In his review of the NHS, will my right hon. and learned Friend take account of those matters and consider the remedy, proposed by Mr. Herbert Morrison, of locally controlled hospitals as an alternative to the present system.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend has raised a very wide issue. The exercise this summer showed some of the weaknesses of centralised pay bargaining, especially involving six different nursing unions and especially when we are trying to negotiate the extremely complicated division of a huge sum of money. We have had to take into account the skills and responsibilities involved in almost 500,000 nursing and midwifery posts, and we must rely on local management and representatives to carry that out. I believe that the exercise has been carried out well. It required considerable commitment for local management to carry it out so quickly and to get the money into the hands of the nurses, with the pay rises coming by November and the back pay by December.

Almost all the gradings have been done correctly, but inevitably some mistakes have been made. That is why we have an agreed appeals procedure, which should now be used. No system involving such a huge service and such huge sums of money could work entirely smoothly, but there are some mischievous people about trying to make political capital out of the fact. COHSE was organising industrial action during the summer while we were still in the early stages of the process, and it has lost no opportunity to do so ever since. In that, it has had the encouragement of the Labour party. Two unions are not helping matters by giving misleading information to their members and by trying—not very successfully—to organise disruptive action in hospitals.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Can the Secretary of State point to any predecessor who has succeeded in forcing many midwives to resign en bloc from the NHS or to make clear their indignation at being placed, after many years of training, on the same grade as people who have lower qualifications? Have any of his predecessors then exacerbated the problem by making rude comments? Is that a positive contribution to industrial relations?

Mr. Clarke: I have made no rude comments about midwives, and I shall make none. I am told that 26 midwives have announced their intention of resigning from a hospital in north London. Those midwives have received a pay increase of 25 per cent., or about £2,000 a year, but they believe that they should receive more. I am sorry about that. I accept that a genuine sense of grievance is felt by the Royal College of Midwives and by many individual midwives. I regret that, because they are dedicated people and it is a non-striking trade union.

I believe that the sense of grievance is based on a misunderstanding and is separate from the COHSE and NUPE dispute which the Labour party supports. The Royal College of Midwives has a long-standing claim that midwives should have a separate grading structure. That is not agreed by the other trade unions or by management, and it has not been accepted by the review body or the Government.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Some of them have received only grade C.

Mr. Clarke: There are no midwives graded C. This year the midwives put to the independent review body a claim for a separate higher grading structure, which was not accepted. But midwives and their union persist in saying that that structure should be applied. Unfortunately, it is not the one that the review body recommended or that was agreed earlier this year, so if they wish to persist with the claim they will have to return to it in the future.

Midwives as a whole have done much better than the generality of nursing staff, and nine out of 10 staff midwives are on the higher of the two grades available to them. They received a pay increase of one quarter, which is worth about £2,000 a year, and a much better career structure has been established for them.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. As the House knows, this is one of the rare occasions on which the House can debate foreign affairs, and there is great pressure on time. I shall allow questions on this private notice question to continue until 11.25, and I ask for brief questions.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Is it not time that we started to tell the truth on this matter? Is not the truth, as reported by Oxfordshire regional health authority, that the majority of clinical nurses in the Oxford region will receive substantial salary increases averaging 20 per cent., that they will receive their new salaries and back pay by Christmas, that the new grading system rewards clinical skills, has been carried out fairly and will assist the recruitment and retention of nurses and that the Government have honoured their commitment fully to fund the pay increase?

Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that Oxford district health authority had no hesitation in describing the pay awards as "angels' delight", that nurses praised the grading review process and that the Oxfordshire chief nursing officer described it as a major step forward? Is it not time that the press and the media in general started to talk about the truth rather than the synthetic broth that has been promulgated by the Opposition?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend has described views that are shared by the great majority of nurses and midwives and the position as it exists in most of the country. Most nurses and midwives regret the attempts of those two unions and the Labour party to organise action that can only damage the reputation of the profession at a time when its reputation deserves to stand high. The Government have recognised that reputation in the pay award.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Secretary of State accept that the basis for the dispute lies in the devious statement that he made in April when he cash-limited the nurses' pay rise by introducing this spurious grading exercise? Since then he has tried to set one group of nurses against another. Does he understand that grade A nurses are experienced and do a vital and responsible job and that the rate of pay recommended for grade A is disgraceful? The Secretary of State should stand by the statement that he made in April, that all nurses were to get a substantial rise in their basic pay, rather than threatening COHSE and NUPE members with legal action and, on top of that, refusing even to discuss the case with them.

Mr. Clarke: The pay increases are almost unique in my experience of pay settlements, in that they are not cash limited. Our original estimate that it would be a 15·3 per cent. increase had to be revised when we had finished to 17·9 per cent. I had to announce further funding in October to keep to our commitment that we would fund the increase in full. It cost more when the grading exercise was carried out and we did not cash limit it at all. The root of the dispute is Left-wing politics.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Given that a necessarily complicated regrading exercise affecting hundreds of thousands of nurses and midwives must lead inevitably to at least a few mistakes being made, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it was for that reason that the unions agreed to the appeals procedure? Further, given the fact that the settlement is rightly the most generous pay settlement ever to be given in the history of the NHS, is not the attitude of the leadership of COHSE and NUPE in apparently trying to suggest to every nurse that he or she must be regraded upwards one of the most irresponsible and hypocritical acts of lack of leadership?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. As he said, the logic of the union's case, as put by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), would ensure that nobody was on the lower of the alternative grades at the various stages. That is contrary to the spirit of the regrading structure that we first negotiated, taking two and a half years over it, with the self-same unions.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I spent last Friday evening listening to 200 nurses from the Wakefield district who are not militants or Left-wingers. They are members of the RCN as well as of COHSE and NUPE and they raised with me anomaly after anomaly in individual cases in respect of the settlement.

What should I say to five nurses at Stanley Royd hospital who were offered the highest grade by the management in Wakefield heath authority and were then told, "Sorry, we have made a mistake. You have got the lowest grade"? What should I tell the nurses who came to the meeting, who were informed that it would be at least five years before their appeals could be heard, many of whom told me that they would be retired by then? What answer should I give those people? Does the Secretary of State accept that he has made a complete shambles of the issue?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is in no better position than me to settle the grade of any nursing or midwifery post. That must be settled by the management. If it is disputed by the individual, there is an appeal process that can properly resolve the problem. I should like to believe that the hon. Gentleman spent his time at the meeting explaining that and trying to ensure that those people discussed with their own health authority the handling of the appeals procedure, and that those who had appealed on the basis of false information from their trade union should withdraw the appeal and help us to get on with it. However, I suspect that that was not the tone of the hon. Gentleman's contribution to the meeting.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the regrading structure has been the result of two years' negotiations with the unions and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) said, it provides for an appeals procedure? It would be wholly wrong if my right hon. and learned Friend were to enter into negotiations with the trade unions. Does not that raise a much more serious problem of precedent elsewhere in the public service, in that, if he were to concede, it would give succour and support to other unions in the public service to take industrial action after agreements had been reached and negotiated and to carry on doing so until they induced Ministers to come back to the negotiating table to renegotiate? That would be a dangerous and improper judgment to make. It would be an error of judgment that the Government as a whole would regret if my right hon. and learned Friend were to give way.

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend; it is extraordinary. It is important to remember that we have all entered into a no-strike agreement and everybody is a party to it. The Government set up an independent review body, which made recommendations contrary to the Government's own evidence, which the Government accepted and implemented for the nurses. In this case, I am glad to say that the independent review body confirmed the regrading and new career structure for nurses and put generous figures upon it for implementation. It would be wrong, above all in the NHS, where patients' well-being is at risk, if industrial action could be taken and, in the face of that, we started to alter the whole structure and abolished the lowest grade because the unions decided that all auxiliary nurses should get pay increases of up to one third.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Is the Secretary of State aware that last Saturday morning I met only RCN nurses who came to see me at my offices, delegated by the RCN at Walton hospital? If the right hon. and learned Gentleman thinks that those nurses are Left-wing loonies, he should have been there. After listening to them, I was delighted that I was a Labour and not a Tory Member of Parliament because I am not sure that I would have got out in one piece if I had been a Tory. The nurses were very angry. They told me of 800 appeals——

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Minister should meet the nurses.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Spearing: I am sorry.

Mr. Heffer: My hon. Friend is backing me up.

I heard that 800 of the nursing staff in Walton and Fazakerley in my constituency have appealed. They are very angry and will not be helped. They think that they have been conned by the Government. Some of the nurses said that they had stuck by their union all this time, but that sooner or later they would have to think differently unless the union took action.

Mr. Clarke: I do not mind nurses putting in appeals. It is predictable that there will be disappointed nurses when they find that they are on a lower grade than some of their colleagues and that they are getting less than the 17·9 per cent., which is the average settlement, because other people are getting 33 per cent. and 40 per cent. awards. Careful handling by all parties was required, and that was carried out by the management and some trade union leaders, but not other trade union leaders. The obvious thing to do now is to follow through the appeals procedure, not to take industrial action. We cannot start altering the basis of the grading structure because COHSE and NUPE keep threatening industrial action to force us to do so.

Mr. Dobson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise to the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) for slightly protracting the interlude in his speech, but you will recall, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) criticised you for accepting the private notice question tabled by the Opposition. It is a convention that, when the Opposition ask for a private notice question and it is refused, we do not refer to it publicly. Will you confirm, Mr. Speaker, that it is equally a convention for hon. Members on Government Benches not to object when you grant the asking of such a question?

Mr. Whitney *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Allow me to deal with it. I did not take it as a criticism.

Debate on the Address

Question again proposed,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Sir Giles Shaw.]*

Mr. Amery: I was almost at the conclusion of my remarks. As a peroration hangs ill in the air, I shall not detain the House any longer.

11.28 pm

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): I thank the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) for the tone of his remarks. Although he has been in Opposition for 24 years—and it does not seem to have affected his amiability—I do not see why he should believe that a mere nine years in Opposition should have done anything to the character of my sunny friend, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

I propose to spread a little ointment on the bruises that the Foreign Secretary may be suffering as a result of my right hon. Friend's brilliant speech. The Foreign Secretary deserves the support of all right-minded people in the difficult task that he has as a member of a Cabinet with the particular Prime Minister under whom he suffers. We shall do our best to help him and accept with tolerable equanimity any misquotation of history or partisan remarks that he may find it necessary to make from time to time to remain not exactly in his leader's affections, but as a tolerated member of her Cabinet.

Many have said that the five months since we debated foreign affairs confirm that we now stand at a watershed in the post-war world, and I hope, conceivably, at a watershed in the history of the human race. In 1945 Russia and the United States emerged as super-powers confronting one another over the middle of a divided Germany in a divided Europe; but in 1988 both super-powers feel increasingly unable to sustain the role that they assumed to themselves in 1945, and particularly if they are compelled to compete in an arms race that they know neither can win.

In the Soviet Union Mr. Gorbachev is, in my opinion—I do not think many would now deny it—trying to change the entire basis on which the Soviet regime has rested at least since 1924—some would say since 1917. Although his domestic perestroika—the reconstruction of the Soviet economy—has failed so far to produce results and is clearly running into heavy weather, the greater openness—the glasnost—that has accompanied perestroika has released a pent-up demand for national freedom not only in eastern Europe but in all the non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union: in the Baltic states, in White Russia, in the Ukraine, in Georgia and, most conspicuously, in the republics of central Asia.

We now find ourselves at a point that appeared to be coming way back in 1956 when the Hungarians rose against Soviet domination, a point at which the possibility of reuniting Europe, which has been divided for nearly half a century, is sufficiently real for the two halves of Europe to exert an increasingly magnetic attraction on one another. One of the challenges to Western diplomacy in the coming years will be to try to create a framework in which this explosive demand for national freedom in eastern Europe can lead to increasing unity between the two halves of Europe. I believe—I do not propose to develop this point now—that to achieve the reunification of Europe may require some important and difficult concessions and revisions of policy on the Western side as well as on the Eastern.

In the United States there has been another presidential election. Mr. Bush has just been elected President of what is still the richest and most powerful country in the world, in an election in which one third of those who might have voted did not bother to register and another third did not bother to vote. He finds himself President with the votes of fewer than one in five of the population and facing a Congress dominated by the other party, which is still bruised by the way in which he fought the campaign.

There is no doubt that the new American Administration will face great difficulties in confronting the formidable problems that await them and which were almost completely ignored in the election campaign. Mr. Bush cannot claim to have a mandate for anything, because he put nothing before the American electorate and only one in five of them bothered to vote for him when the time came.

I have some sympathy with those who say—it is increasingly popular to say it, even in Britain, let alone the United States—that America's domestic deficit is not a major problem. As a percentage of America's national output it is a good deal lower than most deficits in the Western world. But the foreign trade deficit is very serious indeed. America is already the biggest single sovereign debtor in the world. Unless something is done about the foreign trade deficit, within two or three years America will owe more than $1,000 billion to the rest of the world—more than all the other sovereign debtors put together. As a result, money from the surplus countries which should be going to help the developing world is flowing into the richest country in the world to finance its trade deficit; so is money from some of the poorest countries, which incurred debts to the United States during the binge of lending to the Latin American countries earlier this decade.

No one is yet taking seriously enough the difficulty of continuing to finance an American external deficit on that scale, and there is the growing reluctance at least of Japan, if not of Germany, to go on buying American bonds, which we are told by the Americans' chief economic adviser are liable to lose 20 per cent. of their value in the next year or two. I am surprised that the Foreign Secretary had nothing to say about the shift in the balance of economic and military power that has taken place in the world in the past decade. Japan is already the strongest economy in the world, although not the largest. It is the third strongest military power, although it is spending only a fraction more than 1 per cent. of its GNP on defence. Nevertheless, it spends a great deal more than Britain, France or West Germany.

The Japanese Government have already made it clear that they want to dethrone the dollar as the world's only reserve currency. Both their central banker and his deputy, Mr. Gyohten, who spoke in London last week, have said that they want the yen to become a key currency.

All this will have an important impact on the removal of barriers inside the European Community, because it is clear that the Japanese Government and institutions will not continue to buy American Government bonds which are certain to lose their value. Increasingly, they will buy hard assets in the United States and elsewhere, and they calculate that if the yen reaches 110 to the dollar, as, according to Mr. Marty Feldstein, is likely, Japan could make a profit exporting from factories in the United States to Japan in any branch of manufacturing industry. It is already making a profit exporting motor cars from the Honda factory in the United States to Japan, and Nissan is hoping to make a profit by exporting cars from Britain to the Community.

I do not believe that the British or European Governments have yet come to terms with the possibility that we shall have a flood of highly reliable, high quality, low-priced Japanese goods produced in Japanese factories in countries inside the European Community and the United States.

All this has an important impact on the problems of defence and disarmament which have featured largely in our discussions today. If the United States fails to deal with its external trade deficit, there is likely to be a collapse of the dollar and a big increase in American interest rates. If those things are accompanied, as is more than possible, by a collapse in the price of oil, revolution and default in the debtor countries in Latin America could follow, with consequences that could distract America's attention from the outside world for at least a generation.

One thing is already certain. If the United States is to make progress mending its foreign deficit, it will have to reduce domestic spending, because it is already working at full capacity. Any cut in domestic spending and a consequent cut in domestic deficit is bound to include a cut of at least $300 billion in American defence programmes over the next few years. As Mr. Bush—unlike Mr. Dukakis—has committed himself to continue all American nuclear programmes, that is bound to mean substantial cuts in America's conventional forces, which are bound to affect the strength of NATO in Western Europe. This is at a time when, because of demographic trends, manpower available for the German army will be 40 per cent. short, and when Britain is cutting its defence spending, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton pointed out.

I am sure that the Secretary of State for Defence will agree that for demographic reasons, we, too, are facing real problems in manning our armed services. In other words, NATO is entering a period of unilateral disarmament, led by the United States, with the co-operation of Britain, West Germany and the Low Countries at least. I challenge the Secretary of State to deny—I will not say the exact truth but the probability—that we are moving into that situation.

It is absolute lunacy not to get on fast with multilateral negotiations, so that the unilateral cuts on which the Government and Western Governments are already embarking become multilateral. I must confess that I found the Foreign Secretary's remarks on that matter somewhat lacking in candour. It is 18 months since Mr. Gorbachev first made his proposal for conventional arms control between the Atlantic and the Urals, to start—contrary to what the Foreign Secretary said—with an inspected verification of the size of forces on both sides of the area, and to be followed by the removal of disparities that are found to exist. I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence will tell us why NATO has not got on with

[Mr. Denis Healey]

that process. Why are we putting up arguments that are known to be untrue as a reason for not getting conventional arms cuts going?

I suggest that the main obstacles are coming from the French and British Governments. The French Government do not want negotiations between NATO and the Warsaw pact. They want negotiations to take place only in the conventional stability talks framework, including neutral countries. At the moment, they are proposing a three-year delay before serious negotiations take place. I hope that the Defence Secretary will tell us what position the British Government are taking on that matter.

I hope that he will tell us also why the British Government are joining the French in holding up progress by refusing to go to the human rights conference in Moscow, yet, at the same time, are saying that progress on human rights matters must be a precondition to progress on conventional disarmament. Having known and loved the Forein Secretary for many years, and knowing that he is a skilled lawyer, I have tried hard to read between the lines churned out for him by the Foreign Office word processor. Incidentally, I congratulate the Box on getting some new softwear. The adjectives were a good deal fresher today than they were in earlier speeches.

It seemed that the Foreign Secretary was trying to get the Prime Minister off the human rights hook on which she has impaled herself. I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence has recovered from his jet lag and from the extraordinary meeting that he attended yesterday at which, apparently, his own Department was unable to put forward any recommendation to the relevant Cabinet Committee on whether the Prime Minister should be allowed to suck up to President Reagan by buying an American instead of a British tank. I hope that he will be able to tell us whether there are just some conditions in respect of human rights to be met, in which case they should be met fairly fast. We should be able to have the conference and get the process started.

I had hoped to be able to make a speech without referring to the Prime Minister. I apologise, especially to my old friend the right hon. Member for Pavilion, but I shall make a few gentle animadversions on the Prime Minister's role in these affairs. She is increasingly seen throughout the world as the major obstacle to all progress —from progress in the Common Market to progress in East-West relations—by standing out alone with impossible demands on human rights. I do not blame the Foreign Secretary for leaving the Chamber. He kindly let me know that he is to make a television broadcast, and we wish him well.

The Prime Minister is a major obstacle to progress in East-West relations. She is a major obstacle to progress in the Western European Union. She said that Spain should not be allowed to join, a week before she went off on an official visit to Spain, thereby showing that unerring sense of tact and timing for which she has become famous, if not loved, throughout the world. She finds herself practically alone now in the Western European Union in pressing for the modernisation of tactical nuclear forces in Germany —something that is absolutely opposed by the German and Belgian Governments, and which the French Government have said they want to delay for at least three years until they see how the conventional arms talks go.

For many years, I have been trying hard to understand the Prime Minister. I am sorry that the Secretary of State for Health has left the Chamber. I have discovered that there is a medical term for the condition from which she suffers. In the psychiatric profession it is known as cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is a psychiatric condition in which the patient finds it absolutely impossible to accept a reality which conflicts with her prejudices or offends her vanity. One of the most famous politicians to suffer from it was Robespierre during the French revolution. That is an analogy that hon. Members with an historical bent might find it worth exploring.

We have seen cognitive dissonance in domestic policy —for example, the poll tax, and the creation of private monopolies to make water and electricity more expensive. We saw it this morning in the National Health Service. I often compare the Prime Minister with Florence Nightingale. She stalks through the wards of our hospitals as a lady with a lamp—unfortunately, it is a blow lamp. *[Laughter.]* I am glad that the Secretary of State for Defence can see the joke. It means that he has recovered from his torpor.

The Prime Minister has already made it clear that she wants to replace the Treasury with an immigrant acolyte from the United States who is regarded by many people as Dr. Who. He certainly resembles Mr. Jon Pertwee, who once acted in that capacity. It now appears that she wants to abolish the Foreign Office and, no doubt, replace the Foreign Secretary with Colonel Oliver North—if Colonel North is able to escape imprisonment in the next few months. She has already shown that she wants to abolish the BBC, the House of Lords, the Church of England and the monarchy. No institution will be left to protect our democracy, except for the Special Air Service and MI5. If I were a member of either of those bodies, I would be waiting to see when her beady eye would fall on me.

Against that background, it is astonishing that the Prime Minister's official mafia at No. 10, led by her Pudovkin, Mr. Bernard Ingham, should have persuaded the sycophants in the Right-wing British press that the right hon. Lady is now the key to world peace and the bridge between Washington and Moscow. However, President Reagan invited Chancellor Kohl to visit Washington before the Prime Minister managed to edge her way in for a cursory working breakfast in Washington —something which I am sure the Foreign Secretary would like to forget. As for being the bridge between Mr. Gorbachev and Washington, we were told that Mr. Gorbachev was coming here to find out from the Prime Minister what the new American Administration thought. Unfortunately, Mr. Gorbachev will already have met the new American Administration in the United States when he comes here.

Indeed, Mr. Gorbachev has already spent many days each with the Prime Minister of Italy, the Chancellor of West Germany and, this week, the President of France. He is fitting in the British Prime Minister right at the end of that long queue, and she has to take second place to President Castro. In many ways, that is appropriate because some of us have always regarded the right hon. Lady as the Castro of the Western world—an embarrassment to all her friends. All she lacks is the beard. If we could once see her as the bearded lady——

Mr. Tony Banks: She shaves every morning.

Mr. Healey: —I am sure that we would all realise the aptness of that comparison.

It is a bit thick for the Prime Minister to pose as a bridge builder when we are told by Mr. Bernard Ingham that her aim is to persuade Kohl to screw Genscher. I do not know whether that is a parliamentary expression, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I can assure you that I took it from reports in *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*. The Prime Minister has an uncanny knack of making friends and influencing people.

The obstacle that the Prime Minister presents to progress in any of those areas is serious. Although the Foreign Secretary will enjoy our support—if that is the right verb—in standing up to her and trying to weasel his way around the obstacles that she has created for him, we shall do our best to help.

I should like to finish with a few words to my own party, because in my sunset years—*[Interruption.]*—I should like to be bipartisan. The British Labour party has a heavy responsibility to offer a positive alternative. We shall not do that if we indulge in a Punch-and-Judy show between abstract unilataralism and abstract multilateralism. The plain fact is that we shall have to have both. The present Government have embarked on unilateral disarmament inside NATO. The United States is embarking on it, too. The really important thing is that we should develop policies calculated to help the movement towards a new basis for international security, which depends on co-operation between the two blocs and in which—I share the Foreign Secretary's hope—the United Nations may be able to perform the role that we all hoped it would perform when it was set up after the war.

If we work hard—I hope that we shall have support from some Conservative Members and perhaps even from some of those on the Government Front Bench—we may be able to shift our Castro in a more sensible direction, or possibly even to marginalise her. I am sure that we would have the support of many institutions, including one not a mile away across St. James's park, if we succeeded in that endeavour.

11.55 am

Sir Ian Gilmour (Chesham and Amersham): I was surprised when the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) used the word, "ointment", because I do not think we would ever see him as an emollient. If my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary was bruised by the words of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)—although I think that he is virtually unbruisable—his bruises would not have been much affected by the remarks of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East. The right hon. Gentleman was interesting when he talked about foreign policy, but, like his right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton, most of his speech was not devoted to foreign policy. However, they were both interesting tours d'horizon as, of course, was the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. I do not want to follow them down their interesting byways, and, although I should like to touch on the issue of human rights, I shall refer mainly to the middle east and the Palestine problem.

The most depressing thing about the Israelis' reaction to the Intifada is that they do not seem to understand that things will never be the same again. The brave Palestinians have permanently changed the middle east and the Palestinian situation. It is depressing that the Israelis do not seem to realise that, although some do.

It has been made perfectly clear that the myth that the occupation of the west bank and the Gaza Strip was in some way benign, has been exploded for ever. It never was benign because there was a great deal of violence and about half the land was appropriated by the Israelis, which is not exactly a benign thing to do. That was always a myth, but it is now seen to be a myth and there is no going back. The status quo cannot be maintained for long.

The second thing that the Intifada has done is to demonstrate the self-control of the Palestinians, because it has been a virtually non-violent operation. There have been one or two terrible instances, like the killing of the Jewish Israeli family at Jericho just before the election, and one or two other dreadful instances. Mostly, however, it has been a question of throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. The violence has come from Mr. Rabin, the settlers and the Israeli army, which has decided that the right way to deal with stone-throwing children is to break their bones or to shoot at them. That is what Mr. Rabin has advocated. Clearly, the violence has come mainly from that side.

The Israelis, however, are not the only guilty party—the Americans are also guilty. After all, they are now shelling out about $4·5 billion a year to be used by the Israelis to shore up the Israeli occupation and their present behaviour. As far as I can see, apart from one or two weak statements by Mr. Shultz, they have done absolutely nothing to stop the brutal repression or to make the Israelis see the error of their ways. The Americans could not even get as far as helping Mr. Peres in the run-up to the election. They were neutral as between him and Mr. Shamir, which was not very helpful.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and the right hon. Member for Gorton talked about human rights. The West is absolutely right to press the question of human rights in the Soviet Union. However, the Palestinians also have human rights. I very much hope that Mr. Gorbachev and Europe will point out that fact to the Americans, because it is absolutely wrong to continue to talk about human rights while supporting what is happening in Palestine. I thoroughly support, and always have supported, the human rights of Soviet Jews—for example, their right to emigrate—but it is grotesque to make an enormous fuss about that while condoning, if not supporting, what is going on on the west bank and the Gaza Strip.

My right hon. and learned Friend and the right hon. Member for Leeds, East talked about the Palestine National Council and its recent declaration, and I welcome what they said. I also welcome what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said about it in Washington. It was one of Mr. Bernard Ingham's happier pieces of reporting, and I do not think that anybody will hold that briefing against him. No doubt, the PNC could have gone further, but it has taken an enormous step forward. It is extraordinary—rather, it is not extraordinary, and one might have expected this—that the Israelis and the Americans were so unforthcoming in their reactions to it.

The Government's task is to push the Americans and the Israelis in the direction of peace, and I endorse what the right hon. Member for Gorton said. If the Israeli Labour party goes, en masse, into a coalition that will not

[Sir Ian Gilmour]

be devoted to the prospect of peace, there will be a serious lookout for Israel and the whole area. I hope that Mr. Peres will maintain his efforts. It is necessary for this country to try to bring pressure to bear on America, because we all know that American policy is, as it always has been, hamstrung by the great strength of the Israeli lobby there. It raises a great amount of money to elect Senators and Congressmen. Unless there is counter-pressure to that lobby, there is no way that American policy will change. Therefore, it is the task of Europe, and particularly of our Government—my right hon. and learned Friend spoke about our relationship with the American Government—to bring that counter-pressure to bear.

We can and should do one thing more. My right hon. and learned Friend did not speak about this, but surely it is high time that we had proper talks with the Palestine Liberation Organisation. We have waited far too long, but now we have a good reason to talk—the PNC statement. The Government have been understandably reluctant, because any comparison that might be made with Ireland and the IRA, but the situations are different. The IRA does not represent anybody. There is a clear majority in Northern Ireland against what it is seeking to do and probably, if there were a plebiscite throughout the whole of Ireland, there still would not be a majority in favour of what it seeks to do. Palestine is different. No serious person could deny that the PLO represents the overwhelming majority of Palestinian people, and it is clear that they and the PLO want a Palestinian state. Therefore, I hope that the Government will start talking to the PLO.

Another objection has been that, allegedly, the PLO believes in violence; but if we went on that criterion, the Government would have to stop talking to Mr. Rabin, Mr. Shamir and various other people like that. That criterion does not apply, and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will tell us that there will be a change of attitude. It is in the interests both of this country and of the Palestinians that we should talk to the PLO so that we can set out our policy and it can explain its policy to us.

The uprising has now been going on for more than a year. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands maimed or wounded. There is a supreme opportunity for peace, as the right hon. Member for Gorton said. I hope that the British Government will do everything in their power to bring home the need for peace to both the Israeli and American Governments.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I appeal for brevity, as Mr. Speaker did at the beginning of the debate. The debate has already been truncated by time spent on the private notice question and many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to contribute to the debate.

12.3 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour), whose elegant, informed and wise remarks have enhanced so many similar debates.

The Foreign Secretary is a calming man. However, one should not allow the cuddly emollience for which he is so famed to mask the fact that there is a different interpretation of the Government's approach and contribution to foreign affairs from that which he provided. One does not need to go over the top to make it. Within the European Community, the Prime Minister continues to establish her reputation as a "Mrs. Nyet" of European co-operation. Her portrayal in the Bruges speech of a highly centralised Europe betrayed what she really thinks about the Community. In her heart, she sees it as being a free trade area, a European Free Trade Association writ large. Her vision is of a Europe of business men. Ours is of a Europe for all its citizens. We need economic success, so we support the single market, but if we are to have a successful single market, we also need common social, regional and environmental policies. That also means developing much more effective democratic institutions.

The Prime Minister's opposition to such changes could cost us dear, for the risk still remains, though it is not as strong as it was not so long ago, that, held up time and again by one or two reluctant members, the majority within the Community will go its own way. An example of this is the central European bank. It is a natural development, which will almost certainly happen in time. Members of the Community have committed themselves to the free flow of capital everywhere by 1990 and this is expected to be of major benefit to this country. However, in the absence of a common bank and a common currency, this would inevitably produce huge swings in interest rates as Governments tried to avoid harmful fluctuations in the value of their currencies. Furthermore, the sheer cost and bother of changing money, along with the added risk involved in dealing with fluctuating currencies, is a real barrier to the policy of economic convergence to which all Governments are committed.

The Prime Minister's vocal opposition to these sensible steps is sad, and it is a mistake for which Britain could pay, for if a common central bank were established with Britain participating, London would be a natural location. If Britain were less enthusiastic, Frankfurt would become the major contender. As we are all beginning to don habits of green, and talk about the environment, it is sad to see that within the European Community, the pushing for improved environmental standards is not coming from this country.

I am entitled to criticise the Prime Minister and the Government about their European attitudes, behaviour and intentions. We have been consistently arguing for many years for a more coherent Community moving in a federal direction. The Labour party spokesman, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), has no such track record. If he and his party had had their way, the Single European Act would not have been passed, and the forward development of the Community, which is essential to our prosperity and influence, would have been halted. The Labour party is in no position to proffer advice in the Community until it gets its own act together.

The Foreign Secretary was right to stress the major changes in East-West relations. The presence of a fresh mind at the head of the Soviet Union has opened up enormous possibilities which two or three years ago would have been unthinkable. We have had the first treaty to reduce the level of nuclear weapons. In some of the world's worst trouble spots, from Afghanistan to Namibia and Angola, we have seen negotiated settlements.

Within the Soviet bloc, there has been a great improvement in human rights. I am not exaggerating that. Mr. Gorbachev has been moving further and faster than anyone imagined that any Soviet leader could or would. It will and has produced enormous stresses from Estonia to Azerbaijan. As the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said, while he was still talking about foreign affairs, this is undoubtedly an historic opportunity and brings with it considerable responsibilities. That is why the Government approach of pressing for the modernisation of the NATO short-range nuclear weapons is a mistake. It undermines the INF treaty and is also premature.

The right approach is to follow the advice of my Free Democratic party colleague, the German Liberal Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who is, after all, the most experienced Foreign Minister in the Western bloc, by attempting to negotiate a multilateral agreement to make modernisation unnecessary. That does not in any way give up the possibility of going ahead with it at a later stage if this proves necessary. It is a variant of the NATO two-stage proposal which did not work at that time but which I and the Secretary of State for Defence supported. The opportunity for the same kind of approach to work this time is much greater.

We must be more positive in our approach to the Eastern bloc and must appreciate the tremendous stress that changes are bringing about. It would be terrible if a generation younger than us looked back at the present Soviet leadership in the same way that we look back at Dubcek and the Prague spring saying that if only Western leaders had been prepared to deal with Gorbachev more effectively he might have survived. Mr. Gorbachev is not in all that strong a position. I accept that the West must not jeopardise its own security, but nor must we miss genuine opportunities to improve relations and the possibility for disarmament.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): The hon. Gentleman has just put his finger on the problem. Mr. Gorbachev is under enormous pressures. He is taking on the party, the army and the KGB and is asking them to change against their own self-interest. What guarantees do the West have that he will succeed? We should welcome what he is trying to do and should help him, but that is not an argument for lowering our guard. On the contrary, we must safeguard our defences.

Sir Russell Johnston: I am not arguing that we should lower our guard. I am saying that it appears that the modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons in Europe is not immediately necessary. We do not need to take that decision now. If we do take the decision and proceed, it will not create the proper climate for the reductions that I know the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) wishes to see as much as I do. As the Foreign Secretary said, I accept that there is no evidence that the Soviet Union is in any way reducing its production of weapons of destruction. I accept that we must be prudent, but as far as possible we must seek to give the opportunity to the other side to respond.

As many hon. Member have said in the debate, the issue about the visit of the Queen to the Soviet Union was very clumsily handled. It is difficult to find out what is true and what is not, but if what has been reported is true a remarkable mistake has been made.

The Gracious Speech talks about support for the United Nations. Can the Secretary of State for Defence tell us when the Government will reverse what I said from the beginning was a wrong decision and go back into UNESCO? It would have been of great encouragement if, when discussing regional problems in the world, the Foreign Secretary had spoken about improving the peace-keeping capacity of the United Nations. Against the background of East-West detente and less stress, there is an opportunity to strengthen the United Nations. Such an opportunity does not normally exist and we should take advantage of it.

It would also have been of great encouragement if when congratulating president-elect Bush—congratulations with which I associate myself—the Foreign Secretary had taken a more definite position on the middle east and on the new opportunity afforded by the PLO's simultaneous recognition of Israel and is assertion of statehood. The Americans are the only people who can get the Israelis to the conference table and we should press them very hard to do so. In that context, I agree entirely with the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham, who spoke with all the authority of a former Minister in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

It is strange that the Government, who have taken such an uncompromising attitude towards human rights abuses in the East, have not put more emphasis on standing up for human rights in other places. South Africa is an obvious example. Rightly or wrongly, many people have the impression that the Prime Minister is more opposed to sanctions than she is to apartheid. More recently, the Iraqi regime were shown by overwhelming evidence to have violated the Geneva protocol by using chemical weapons against the Kurds. Perhaps to say that what the Foreign Secretary said was rhetoric would be a slight exaggeration, but I am afraid that the Government have not gone beyond the level of making rather feeble protests.

At a meeting in the House earlier this month, a first-hand account was given of the effects of these gas attacks by doctors who visited the town of Halabja shortly after it was attacked by Iraqi Government forces. They told of a town strewn with 2,500 corpses, most of them civilians. They were the victims of the indiscriminate use of chemical weapons. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), who is not in the Chamber, recently dealt with this matter and described the Iraqi actions. He spoke of,

> "The deeply disturbing and indefensible use of these weapons by a Government against its own population."

That appears to be the official Government position. Yet within two weeks of the hon. Gentleman using that expression the Government had signed an agreement with Iraq substantially to increase its export trade credits. That is indefensible. Today's papers carry pathetic pictures of Kurdish refugee camps, and I should like to know what the Government propose to do about them.

The Government never cease to tell us that under their stewardship the economy is stronger than ever before. Now is not the time to go into the details of whether that is so, but one of the things that is not stronger than ever before is our overseas aid contribution, which is worse than it has ever been before. The Government have

[Sir Russell Johnston]

publicly accepted the United Nations target of 0·7 per cent. but have not done very much about it. They have allowed our contribution to fall rather than to increase. It was 0·52 per cent. in 1979 and is now 0·29 per cent.

Over the past few months, the Government have boasted that they plan to increase aid by 5 per cent. in real terms. The Minister with responsibility for overseas development developed that argument. One can do anything with statistics if one really tries. That increase works out at less than 1·5 per cent. a year, or less than half the present rate of growth in the economy. That means that the Government are planning to fall even further behind the United Nations aid target than they have already. It is a question of priorities, and I am afraid that, for the Government, overseas development is less of a priority than it was eight years ago when they came to office.

In Britain, overseas aid is less of a priority than in any other European Community country. Denmark and the Netherlands easily reached the 0·7 per cent. target and Belgium, France, West Germany and Italy all contribute a greater percentage than we do. The Government talk of a target. I thought that a target was something that one worked towards rather than worked away from. I hope that the recently announced change in Government policy about aid to Kampuchea will be implemented and successful. That country is perhaps one of the most needy, and to hold back any contribution was a moral mistake.

At the start of the debate the Foreign Secretary gave us a picture of the Government's stewardship of our international relations which was misleading and in some respects rather complacent. Because of the lack of time, I cannot cover all the ground, but I have referred to one or two important points.

I conclude by hoping that when the Secretary of State for Defence replies he will seek to answer some of the questions that have been asked, not only by me but by other hon. Members. In recent times in foreign affairs debates—and they are not very frequent—Ministers have tended to give more priority to making their own speeches than to answering hon. Members' questions. I believe that the House deserves better than that.

12.20 pm

Sir Dennis Walters (Westbury): The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) made an interesting and well-informed speech which ranged widely over many topics. I agree with what he said about the middle east and, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour), with whom I wholly agreed, I intend to concentrate my remarks on that area.

In the many years that I have been addressing the problems of the middle east, the situation there, which was bleak and gloomy, has become progressively more so. If I set out to analyse in great detail why that is so, my speech would not remain the brief one that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would like me to make and which I intend it to be.

In a nutshell, it can fairly be said that the overwhelming responsibility for lack of progress falls on Israeli intransigence and on American acquiescence in such intransigence. There are many in Israel who want peace, but sadly they have not been able to assert themselves, as we saw again in the recent election. Because of internal Zionist pressure, the might of the United States has remained firmly aligned on the side of Israel, regardless of American and Western interests and irrespective of international law, justice and morality. Israel has vehemently and with deplorable consistency rejected the concept of exchanging territory for peace when dealing with Palestinian territory and, as a result, initiative after initiative has foundered.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham rightly said, this debate is taking place only a few days after a new window has been opened. There is no doubt that the developments in Algiers, which have seen the Palestine Liberation Organisation accept resolutions 242 and 338 and renounce violence, have provided a new and welcome ray of hope. Whether that hope will be translated into progress depends on the response which is given to the PLO initiative. Mr. Shamir's response has been predictably and offensively dismissive and that of the United States disappointingly lukewarm, but these are early days in the life of the new Administration and, therefore, there is still much to hope and work for there.

On the other hand, the response of the European Community has been commendably positive, as has been that of most countries throughout the world. I was delighted that the Prime Minister raised the issue with President-elect Bush during her visit to Washington because, whatever Opposition Members may say, the Prime Minister, of all European leaders, carries the greatest influence and authority in Washington. We hope that the demarches that she made on the subject received a sympathetic hearing and that she will persevere in her efforts in that direction. To achieve a peace settlement in the middle east would be a sensational diplomatic triumph for President Bush and for the Prime Minister and the steps necessary to bring about such success would command the wholeheaerted support of our European partners, most of whom have usually been ahead of us in their attitude to middle east policies.

Acceptance of resolution 242 and rejection of the use of force are precisely the policies that successive British and other Western Governments have been continually urging the PLO to adopt. It needed courage for the PLO to do so, particularly at the moment, so soon after a Shamir electoral victory and with the continuing horrors on the West Bank. It required much skill and determination by Mr. Arafat to obtain agreement in Algiers and a warm response from Her Majesty's Government was both timely and right.

The Palestinian declaration offers a perfect opportunity for upgrading our relations with the PLO, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) pointed out—an upgrading that many of us believe to be long overdue—and for commencing a dialogue at ministerial level. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence or my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will soon be able to say something specific about that.

If the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, which we and virtually everyone else have endorsed, mean anything they mean self-determination, and that in turn means a state. The two-state solution is the one that ordinary men and women everywhere, not least in Britain, regard as being sensible and fair. It now has the official backing of the

PLO. It deserves the support of all countries which wish to see peace and stability restored to one of the most volatile and dangerous areas in the world.

The uprising of the west bank and Gaza, after 21 years of illegal occupation, repression and suppression of human rights and liberties, has now continued for nearly a year. The response of the Israeli forces has been incredibly brutal. It has resulted in over 300 Palestinian men, women and children being shot dead. The Israeli Minister of Defence has instructed his soldiers to aim to wound demonstrators rather than arrest them. Earlier, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham said, the intention was to break their bones. Rightly, a good deal of world attention has been focused on the daily shooting, maiming, gassing and detention without charge or trial of Palestinians of both sexes and all ages who are seeking a minimum of respect and justice. That was especially so before the television cameras were excluded. These activities have been rightly condemned on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and by other Ministers responsible for foreign affairs.

Our historic responsibility for the plight of the Palestinians is greater than that of any other country except, perhaps, the United States. We should acknowledge this with a show of understanding and generosity instead of the qualifications and equivocations in which we too frequently indulge. In that context, the abstention on the recent United Nations General Assembly resolution condemning the Israeli violation of human rights in the occupied territories was hard to understand, let alone to explain. I hope that such equivocation and weakness is now behind us and that Her Majesty's Government will be in the vanguard of the countries that are ready to sieze the opportunity that is now on offer, and after 21 years to ensure that there is a start to real progress towards peace in the middle east.

12.32 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I intended to make a fairly lengthy speech, but in view of the statements that have been made from the Chair I have decided to throw my notes away and speak off-the-cuff. We have had some great vintage speeches during the debate, certainly from my right hon. Friends the Members for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench. The same can be said of the Foreign Secretary's speech. There have been interesting contributions.

I approve entirely of the word of advice that my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East gave to our people in the Labour party. He said that we must understand that we need both unilateral and multilateral disarmament. I could not agree more. On that basis, there is no need for us to get rid of our unilateral view on nuclear weapons. My right hon. Friend has reinforced the argument that some of us have been advancing for many years. We have always believed that we should start with ourselves and then work for multilateral nuclear disarmament throughout the world. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend has underlined that argument. I hope that it will be repeated by my Front-Bench colleagues and that it will be underlined that that is the position of the Labour party.

I agree entirely with the remarks of the hon. Member for Westbury (Sir D. Walters) and with those of the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour). I was always a great supporter of the state of Israel. I have argued for it on many occasions. Those of us who spent our years in the forces during the last war took the view, when we heard of what had happened to Jewish people under Hitler, that the Jews had a right to a country of their own. We felt strongly about that and supported the state of Israel. It is interesting to note that the first country to recognise and give support to the state of Israel was the Soviet Union.

We all felt that it was right that the Jewish people should have their own state, but the actions on the Gaza strip and the west bank are unacceptable. I have believed for a long time that the Palestinian people have a right to their own state. I welcome the declaration in Algiers and the fact that 50 nations have already recognised the proposed new state. It is not just a matter of talking to the Palestine Liberation Organisation, although I would agree with that wholeheartedly. I wish that the Labour party would invite the PLO to send a delegate to the Labour party conference. It has not done so yet, but I have argued for it for some time. Arising out of such talks would be an acceptance of the concept of a state for the Palestinian people. There will be no peace in the middle east unless that is recognised, especially by Britain. We have a special responsibility because we were the last people to dominate the Palestine area. We upped and left it, and, although many years have passed, we still have a responsibility to work for peace.

I was the leader of the first Labour party delegation to visit Israel, Palestine and the west bank after the six days war. The Israelis said that the area would be in their hands for only a short time and they would use it as a bargaining factor for peace. Twenty-one years later matters are worse, with area after area having been taken over by the Israelis, new settlements established and new reactionary concepts developed.

There are people in Israel who are sick of what is happening and who want peace. Some of the early pioneers and their children want peace. The current state is not what they thought would happen and they are concerned about it. We must encourage the state of Israel to reconsider its future and we must help it in every possible way.

I have already raised with the Secretary of State the treatment of the Kurds, who are one of the oldest of peoples. When I was a lad I read about the Medes and the Persians. The Medes go back to 2,000 BC and are the oldest established people. The Kurds do not have a state of their own, although for a brief period after the first world war there was some acceptance of a state of Kurdistan, but that was overthrown at the Lausanne conference. The Kurds have a right to their own state. There are 20 million Kurds spread throughout five different countries. What has happened since the end of the Iraq-Iran war—an end that we all wanted—has been absolutely horrific. Thousands of people, including the elderly and children, have been killed by chemical weapons. We also have responsibility there but we tend to ignore it. At first our Government almost tried to pretend that nothing had happened. The Americans learnt through their intelligence service that chemical weapons had been used, but then the Americans are not that bothered about obtaining oil from that area. Our commercial and oil

[Mr. Eric S. Heffer]

interests determined that we did not say anything. We must speak out because history also shows that we have a responsibility to those people.

I know that I am straying far and wide, but I want to mention human rights. Some younger Members of the House, who came in at the previous election, always snigger and sneer when I speak on human rights as though I am a dedicated supporter of the internal regime of the Soviet Union. Obviously, they have never heard the speeches that I have made, the questions I have put or the delegations I have accompanied to the Polish, Czechoslovakian and Soviet embassies—you name it, I have been there. In fact, the two areas of the world where I have never been welcomed—certainly not by their embassies—are the Soviet Union and the United States. I have also argued about the role of the United States in countries such as Chile, Nicaragua and elsewhere.

We must not have double standards. If hon. Members are genuine democrats, they must fight for human rights in every part of the world. I did not take too kindly to the Prime Minister going to Poland—not that it seems to have made much difference. There is an interesting article in *The Independent* today by Anne Applebaum in Warsaw. She refers to Mr. Rakowski's themes since he was appointed Prime Minister. He is quoted as saying:

> "'Mr. Walesa demands recognition of Solidarity before talks between government and opposition take place . . . This isn't possible.'"

The Prime Minister may not have helped events when she visited Poland.

To be honest, I found it a bit sickening that the right hon. Lady went over there and talked about the recognition of Solidarity, while, at the same time, introducing legislation here and acting against GCHQ. We have the worst anti-trade union legislation in western Europe.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is called hypocrisy.

Mr. Heffer: Yes, there is no question about that. We must not have double standards. For that reason I would love Conservative Members to get up—not many of them have done so—and fight for human rights in Chile and pledge their support for the people of Nicaragua who are trying to create a new society. Of course, people will make mistakes, but we should always be in favour of those who support the democratic process and real human rights.

I had a lot more to say, but I hope that I have at least made my position clear on the fundamental issues. The Secretary of State was slightly pessimistic, but I agree with him that, because of what Mr. Gorbachev is trying to do, we have an opportunity to develop relations with the Soviet Union. Here at last is a leader who recognises that if the Soviets continue to build up arms and maintain high levels of armaments, they cannot do the things that ordinary people want. We must help Mr. Gorbachev, despite the criticism and demands that we rightly make about human rights. We must help the Soviet Union because it is in everyone's interest to have a peaceful world.

12.44 pm

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) will not expect me to agree with everything that he said, but he confirmed the wisdom of throwing away one's notes by making a speech which was easy to listen to. I regret that he did not elaborate on his point about the compatability of unilateral and multilateral disarmament. If he had done so, perhaps I would not have understood it any better than what he did say.

I shall follow other hon. Members and talk about the most important question of foreign policy—East-West relations. We should understand clearly why glasnost and perestroika have been adopted. There is general agreement that one reason is the failure of Socialism economically. About 30 years ago Khruschev forecast that the Soviet Union would overhaul the United States by the 1980s economically, but the reality has been the opposite. The gap between the two super-powers has grown ever wider, which is why Mr. Gorbachev is introducing market mechanisms and why he needs Western help. Let us be clear about what Mr. Gorbachev's objective is. Liberalisation will be limited. He is not striving for Western-style democracy. He is a Leninist, and he says so. His objective is not to abandon Communism, but to make it more efficient.

The second reason rests in Soviet relations with the rest of the world. Mr. Gorbachev has seen that a policy of Soviet expansion is inconsistent with expanding the Soviet domestic economy. He sees that a continued policy of expansion would take too much of the Soviet Union's limited resources, and the same is true of the Soviet Union's other adventures abroad, such as those in Afghanistan, Angola and south-east Asia. He sees that the Soviet Union could not match the United States if it came to an all-out arms race and that a policy of expansion would continue to alienate the West. In particular—and this is the most important point—he sees that his policy of expansion at the expense of the West has been a failure. It has failed because of the firmness, unity and strength of the free world. Years of propaganda, subversion, disinformation, menaces and cajolery have failed to split the Western world.

What do we expect to be the course of glasnost and perestroika? The Foreign Secretary said that economically the Soviet Union is groping for solutions, and the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said that perestroika is in heavy weather. The heavy weather that the Soviet Union is going through now is likely to be nothing compared with the heavy weather that it will face at home and abroad in coming years.

I cannot think of any example of a Communist state democratising successfully. One can think of examples of Right-wing dictatorships achieving democracy. Spain and Portugal are only two of the most striking. Argentina, with some assistance from Britain in the form of the Falklands war, achieved democracy, and it may be that Pakistan is about to achieve it. There is a simple explanation why it is so much more difficult for a Communist country to achieve democracy, and it is that in a Communist country the state owns the means of production, distribution and exchange. Everything—prices, wages, investment, output, credit and foreign exchange—is controlled by the state. To dismantle a Communist dictatorship, one would have to dismantle the economic side, whereas in Spain, Portugal and other Right-wing dictatorships, that was unnecessary.

There will be great opposition from the bureaucrats in the Soviet Union whose positions are threatened. There will be great confusion among business managers, who have no training in market techniques. There will be price rises, shortages and other problems.

On the political side, the differences between nationalities, such as those in Azerbaijan and Armenia, will become more numerous. The troubles in the Baltic states will spread to other parts of the Soviet Union. The rivalry between eastern European countries, such as Hungary and Rumania, will develop in other areas. The resentment of Soviet domination that is characteristic of the countries of eastern Europe will become more evident, and we may have repetitions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

If that is a reasonably accurate, although pessimistic, forecast, what should Western policy be? We are right to welcome glasnost and perestroika and to hope that Mr. Gorbachev remains in power, but can we do anything to help? On the economic front, we should pursue our own interests. We shall not help by giving a great deal of aid to the Soviet Union. The banks which lend a great deal of money to the Soviet Union may lose much of it. But there is one way in which we could help Mr. Gorbachev and sustain the policies of glasnost and perestroika; that is, by continuing to be firm, united and strong. We should continue the policies that have helped to bring Mr. Gorbachev to his present way of thinking. If the problems that I foresee for the Soviet Union lead to a reaction from Mr. Gorbachev's political opponents, who still exist, the generals or the KGB, and if there is a call for a return to the hard line at home and abroad, it would be a great error if at that time it appeared to the Soviet Union that the West was disunited and weak. That would provide a justification for such a reaction and might tempt the generals and the KGB to return to foreign adventure.

We should place in that context the present policy of the Labour party, which is that we should give away 100 per cent. of our nuclear deterrent in return for 3 per cent. of the Soviet Union's deterrent. That form of unilateral disarmament, which is the policy of the Labour party for the moment, would not be helpful. Who knows what its policy will be in a few months' time?

Glasnost and perestroika have not yet penetrated the Soviet armed forces. I shall give a few examples of what the Soviet Union could do to confirm that it is not simply talking about moving to a defensive military strategy in Europe, but is doing something about it.

For example, it would be helpful if the Soviet army were to withdraw its offensive bridging capability from the Elbe to the Volga and the mobile fuel pipelines, which are designed to help Soviet tanks in a surprise invasion of Western Europe. They should withdraw them a long way back from where they are now. It would be helpful if the Soviets ceased to train their spetsnaz forces in the assassination of leading figures in the west, both political and military, in the hours leading up to a surprise attack by the Soviet Union. It would be helpful if the Soviets ceased to train their military forces in the offensive use of chemical weapons. Those are some of the things that we have yet to see. I do not see any sign, in practice, of the Soviet Union moving in such a direction.

I am not making a pessimistic speech. I hope that I am being realistic and constructive. I am optimistic that we could be at the beginning of a lasting new era of good relations between East and West. We have already made great progress. Ten years ago, the topic of discussion was how long Western Europe could survive. I remember Henry Kissinger, who was the American Secretary of State at the time, giving us about 10 years. He said that in one of his unguarded moments, but I think that he meant it. Now the question is not that at all, but how long tyranny can survive in the Soviet Union. That is a massive step forward. We should continue the policies that have brought us success.

12.56 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): The Gracious Speech gave the emphasis that one would expect to the high priority that the Government put on national security and to the importance of the strength and effectiveness of our armed forces. However, there is one aspect to which Her Majesty's Government and the Secretary of State have given insufficient priority—the recruitment role and place of ethnic minorities in the armed forces.

That matter should not be seen purely as of esoteric interest to sympathetic and concerned royal colonels-in-chief or to Members of Parliament who have within their constituencies large numbers of constituents who are drawn from ethnic minorities. The matter goes to the heart of the vision that we have for our country and for our armed forces. It is vital for the maintenance of the security of the state and our country that the armed forces should be seen to be representative of a cross-section of our community in every way as well as pillars and examples of good practice in the promotion of equal opportunity. Therefore, it is not a matter of esoteric interest and certainly not of party political interest, but it goes straight to the heart of the effectiveness and honour of the armed forces.

The subject has been thrown into sharp relief over the past week through the response to the question asked by the right hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Sir B. Hayhoe) about the figures made available by the Ministry of Defence for recruitment into the armed forces from among the ethnic minorities. The figures show that there is real cause for concern about the level of recruitment. Ethnic minorities make up 1·6 per cent. of applicants to the armed forces, while in the age group most affected, between the ages of 19 and 24, they make up 5·7 per cent. of applicants. That must be a matter of concern.

So, too, must be the relative percentages of those who are accepted for service in the armed forces. The general acceptance rate is 28·4 per cent.; the rate for ethnic minorities is 19·1 per cent. The Ministry of Defence must hold an inquiry into what lies behind those figures, and the inquiry should lead to action. I hope that the Secretary of State will tell us what he proposes to do to improve those statistics and to make a concerted and focused recruitment drive which recognises the importance of placing advertisements in the ethnic minority press and of targeting the areas with the greatest numbers of ethnic minorities. Work must be done in schools, borough fairs and so on, and a positive effort should be made to hold up a career in the armed forces as something desirable, not only as service to the country but for acquiring the skills that will equip people in areas of high unemployment the better to go forward in later life.

The MOD should also examine the fact that fewer ethnic minority applicants are successful than general applicants. The Select Committee on Defence published a report earlier this year making clear, as the MOD's response agreed, the injunction and requirement for an impartial selection process—impartial in the letter and the spirit. I should like some reassurance about that impartiality.

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

We must go further. The publication of these figures gives the Secretary of State and the Ministry of Defence the chance to think again about their response to the Select Committee's first report, which stressed the importance of monitoring what was happening, in cap badge terms, in regiments around the country. I refer to the selection and the successful completion of entry into these regiments by the ethnic minority communities. If the armed forces are to be representative, as it is widely accepted that they should be, and if the public are to perceive them as not discriminating by reference to racial origins, the prestigious regiments, particularly the Guards regiments, should set an example by being seen to be fully integrated.

The Scots, Welsh and Irish Guards may advance the argument of the traditional territorial ethos governing the recruitment of their members. But the Coldstream and Grenadier Guards have a traditional image as national regiments that recruit from the cities and inner cities, and in them, particularly, there is no excuse for the present dearth of black faces.

One is not suggesting for one moment that there should be a reduction in standards, because there does not have to be a reduction in standards. One is not suggesting for one moment that there should be special favours for ethnic minority applicants, but one is saying that it is vital that the Ministry of Defence and the Secretary of State should be in a position to judge the success or otherwise of the recruitment of ethnic minority youngsters into the forces as the result of the concern that has been expressed by the Secretary of State and by hon. Members. Without the figures, one cannot do that.

There is no need for me to rehearse the arguments that were put to the Secretary of State in the dialogue that he had with the Committee on the occasion of his giving evidence to it, save to say that elsewhere in the service of the Crown—one recognises the differences that he himself highlighted—in the Civil Service the role of ethnic monitoring is recognised as taking a positive part in promoting equal opportunities. In the light of the figures and what they reveal and the benefit that has come from the response that has been given to the right hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth, the time has come to extend it to monitoring by cap badge, as the Defence Committee originally recommended. If the Secretary of State is not prepared to do that across the board, he should at least introduce a pilot scheme whereby it could be done.

The Secretary of State should recognise also the lessons that we can legitimately learn from the United States. We know the real differences that exist in force traditions between the United States and the United Kingdom. But the Secretary of State must surely recognise what an honour guard means and what it does for the spirit of a nation. In the honour guard that greeted the Prime Minister in that historic photo session only a few days ago there was seen to be a representative cross-section of the population of the United States. That guard said something not only about what President Reagan felt about our Prime Minister but about the ethos of the United States and where it is 25 years on from the assassination of President Kennedy. There is no denying that; it is a fact.

We should make sure that, for example, when President Bush comes to our country, we are in a position to have similar photographs flashed across the Atlantic to say something about our country and where we are at this time.

Monitoring does not seem to put an intolerable strain on the resources and the ingenuity of the Ministry of Defence. The argument that it is not practicable to monitor does not carry much weight. If we have a mind to do it, and if we have a will to do it—and we should be of such a mind and will—it can be done.

While I am on the subject of the Prime Minister, may I say that we know her favourite poet. The Secretary of State should reflect on that point when he considers how to respond to the debate. The Prime Minister's favourite poet is a much misunderstood man—a man who was a real friend of the ordinary foot soldier. He is even more misunderstood now that he has become known as the Prime Minister's favourite poet, and he posthumously basks in her admiration. Rudyard Kipling had something to say in relation to the merits of service men, whatever their origin. He recognised that whether from "east or west", wherever people come from, regardless of border or breed or birth,

> "When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth,"

they stand together as men in the service of a cause. We should recognise that in terms of our own armed forces. In this country, black and white come not from the ends of the earth, but from Harlesden, Handsworth, Brixton and Bradford, and they stand not face to face, but side by side. It is the responsibility of the House to ensure that they are able to do that.

1.11 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Given the pressure of time, I shall forgo my comments on foreign policy except to refer to the contribution made by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), who stressed the British Government's need —which I endorse—to take a major lead in Europe on green issues. Concern for the environment and ecology is mounting throughout Europe and we have to be seen to be delivering solutions. Moreover, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) stressed at Chatham house last week, if we do not, we shall find ourselves, as other democratic Governments, increasingly vulnerable to the peace movement—as we were in the 1960s and 1970s—and to the Soviet use of the growing green movement. That has happened in Germany with the green movement, and such movements will be orchestrated elsewhere.

I am not saying that the Soviet Union does not believe in environmental improvement, but it is a practitioner of realpolitik and will take advantage of any situation. It will try to obtain technology transfer from the West if it can and to persuade us to reduce our defence spending and our efforts to modernise our short-range missiles. It has turned on the pressure by saying that if we spend less on weapons, we could do more to protect the environment. We must seize the historic opportunity offered by the improved climate in the Soviet Union since Mr. Gorbachev has been in charge. We must help him to achieve the necessary reforms and we must act positively, but prudently.

I shall now turn to a defence matter that is close to my constituency interests—the decision that the Government must make in the process of modernising their weaponry and maintaining a serious capability, particularly on the central front—the decision about which tank we should choose. I must put my comments in the context of the state of the threat, because procurement depends on the nature and immediacy of the threat. We have entered an improved international climate, so there is no pressing argument for the military to have a particular weapon on a particular date. I lived with generals and the military hierarchy for a while in the Ministry of Defence, so I know that one becomes frustrated when they argue for month after month about what they would like, and gold-plating it, and then, having come to a conclusion, expecting their choice to be delivered when they want it. It is not relevant to the argument to say that the Abrams tank could come into service two or three years before a British equivalent.

I want to refer to the helicopter fiasco and the length of time taken to make a decision. I must point out that we still do not have an effective helicopter strategy. It is difficult for the layman to judge the precise capability of different tanks and to decide whether the American tank might be heavier on fuel or have a higher infra-red profile. Obviously, the differences between the two are fine, otherwise the Ministry of Defence would have come to a definitive view. One argument that has been put forward by the Americans is that it would be too risky to wait for something that is on the drawing board when the American tank can be purchased off the shelf in working order and at a good price—and that view is shared by some people in the Ministry of Defence.

We may be looking at the issues in a false context. People cite the AWACS and the waste of procurement resources that that entailed, when we had eventually to buy the American version. The British did not deliver on time, nor at the agreed price, but that must be seen in the context of the feebleness of the project management and the fact that the Ministry kept changing its requirements. One should not compare the AWACS project with the tank project. Vickers had long identified the weaknesses of the Challenger, before it bought the company that is to make it. I urge the Government to give Vickers a little credit for buying the royal ordnance factories and, within a year, building the most modern tank factory in Europe at Leeds, to match the one in Newcastle, with over £10 million invested. Surely if that is the Government's philosophy—to move the state sector into private hands—we should give the company some encouragement.

The company knew that the tank had an ineffective fire control mechanism because it had a better one in the mark III tank and the designs for the Vickers mark VII can be, and are being, translated into the new Challenger. It is not a matter of this being a paper tank on the drawing board. It is already a good tank and we are losing sight of that fact among the welter of criticisms. It has a vulnerable aspect, but that can be, and is being, remedied.

We face more than a military choice. The issue that we face is how the British Government responds to industry, and particularly to the technological industries of the future. There is a military dimension. If we lose this order we will find ourselves incapable, as an industrial and military country, of producing a heavy tank. We have to look at American motives. It is not just that they want export orders. I believe that they wanted to take over Westland to use the Black Hawk to gain a monopoly position for the supply of helicopters in the free world. They wish to have a monopoly manufacturing capability for tanks in the free world.

Therefore, despite the accusations and many valid criticisms made by the Public Accounts Committee, we have to try to compare, more than we do, like with like. Our procurement system may be inept at times but so is that of the Americans and of every other country. What we forget when we criticise our manufacturing industry is the huge costs going into the production and development of American weaponry and the fact that the American Government are directly helping those American manufacturers to become the monopoly supplier in that sector, whether it be helicopters and the colossal orders for Black Hawk, which can be sold only to the American Department of Defence, or the Abrams tank. We have to bear in mind that their objective is to ensure that the British capability ceases to exist.

The Americans, particularly through the Darpa Organisation, and through the Department of Defence programmes, such as the strategic computer programme, consciously use defence spending to boost their main industrial base, particularly the new technological industries. We have a duty to do the same. Therefore, rather than lose the capability of making a tank, particularly, when it is a high technology part of the tank, the Government should support our tank, even though it may take a little longer to produce to precise specifications than the American one. Even that may be in doubt. I understand that modifications may be needed to the American tank, and I have no evidence that AWACS will be produced on time and to the conditions laid down. Why should the tank be any different?

We cannot go on assuming that the Americans will transfer their technology. We should not put ourselves into the position where we are not capable of developing these technologies ourselves. This decision is not or should not be a mere bottom of the line accounting decision. It is not clear that there is a lead-up on costs. There are major military, political and industrial considerations. Above all, they are political. We are still looking for better guarantees from a Conservative Government that they genuinely care about the north and regional development. We are concerned not just about the loss of jobs in Leeds if we lose the order, but about our perception of the intentions and seriousness of our Government.

1.18 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I shall be as brief as possible, as many hon. Members wish to speak. We should look at the methods of constructing foreign affairs debates, because it is not satisfactory to have five hours general ramble on any issue that any hon. Member cares to raise. That is unsatisfactory from all points of view, and it does not concentrate our minds on a particular region.

I shall raise two issues. The first is the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war. We have all witnessed, albeit through television and media reports, the needless deaths of 500,000 people. Every industrial country has had complicity in that either by the direct supply of weapons or by supply through third parties, or by the extension of trade and aid credits to either country. Those things have contributed to the war machines in Iran and Iraq and we are now dealing with the horror of the aftermath of that war.

Hon. Members have spoken about the plight of the Kurdish people and I shall deal with that later. I know that

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

the Government are in the process of reopening diplomatic relations with Iran. If those relations are reopened, some concern should be expressed about human rights in Iran. Ever since Khomeini came to power thousands of people have been put to death because they opposed the Islamic republic, or were trade unionists or people who opposed the war. That bloodthirsty regime has much blood on its hands.

Since the ceasefire and the opening of peace negotiations with Iraq new areas for killing have opened in Iran and figures ranging from a low estimate of 800 to a high estimate of 3,000 have been given as the numbers of people executed by the Khomeini regime since the end of the war. One hopes that if a British ambassador is restored to Teheran his first call of duty will be to express concern about the plight of prisoners in Iran, the people who are on death row there and the murders that are still going on. As with the regime in Iraq, the Iranian regime is not a clean one.

Some of my hon. Friends spoke about Iraq. The Government there are fascists and through the Ba'ath Socialist party they control all levels of activity and are brutal to political dissidents. One war that did not stop when the welcome ceasefire between Iran and Iraq took place was the war against the Kurdish people. That war is different in each country and in Iraq the treatment is vile and loathsome.

In the Easter Adjournment debate I raised the matter of the deaths at Halabja, and it has been raised again since then. Since Halabja many thousands of Kurdish people have been killed by chemical weapons in Iraq. On behalf of the Kurdish Front and other political parties Masoud Barzani has sent a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to all world leaders. It is a moving letter and I shall quote briefly from it:

> "It seems that nothing will deter the Iraqi government from using Chemical weapons against the Kurdish People in the future also, unless the world community especially the Security Council takes some serious measures in this respect."

Serious measures are indeed called for. Thousands of people have fled from Iraq into Turkey, but that is not because they welcome or recognise the contribution that the Turkish Government have made to Kurdish people in the past. They are fleeing out of a sense of absolute desperation because of what is happening to them in Iraq. I know that small amounts of aid have been offered to Turkey to look after those refugees, but we now learn that many refugees have fled from Turkey to Iran in order to avoid the winter cold and the persecution that many people have suffered.

The Kurdish people are in crisis and that crisis is probably worse than it has ever been. It is vital that western Europe, the United States and the Soviet Union wake up to that and demand that the United Nations be allowed to send in aid at least to maintain the life and limb of those Kurdish people. Above all, there must be some long-term solution to the Kurdish problem. I have had meetings with ambassadors and I have had meetings at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about the plight of the Kurdish people.

I accept that the officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) are appalled by the use of chemical weapons against the Kurdish people. I believe them when they say they are appalled and understand how they feel about it, but words alone will not solve the problem. The Iraqi Government will not take seriously one word that is said by any industrial power unless something serious is done. Because of the heavily censored press of Iraq, mere condemnation will have no effect whatever. The only thing that they will understand is the refusal of credit of up to £200 million for further trade with Iraq. We should not encourage business men who made money out of the war to make money out of the peace. The Fascist regime in Iraq needs to be isolated until it stops murdering the Kurdish people in their thousands. If we do not speak up, no one else will do so. I hope that the Minister recognises the horror that the Kurdish people face and the responsibility of all Governments to do something to protect the precious lives of those people.

This year has been one of unprecedented so-called environmental disasters. There have been floods in Bangladesh and floods and drought in Africa, and a series of hurricanes have devasted the people of central America and the Caribbean. Some of those disasters are natural —for example, a weather cycle causes hurricanes and consequent death and destruction—but others are not so natural. There is a strong link between the likelihood of flooding in Bangladesh and the deforestation of the Himalayas, just as there is between the drought in north Africa and the deforestation of the mountains of Kenya. On the one hand, deforestation causes microclimatic changes which bring about drought and, on the other hand, lead to loss of ground cover to prevent the run-off of water which itself causes floods. That precious water could contribute to the agriculture of the future.

This subject perhaps warrants a special debate so that we can discuss the effects of environmental pollution in this country, western Europe and throughout the world. It has been known for a long time that, if we continue to burn up fossil fuels at the present rate, carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere will rise. That in turn will cause a global warming, the melting of the polar ice caps and the invasion of much land by rising sea levels. Such climatic changes will bring about drought, floods and other major changes in the earth, just as other forms of pollution, which have led to the rapid depletion of the ozone layer, will undoubtedly cause further environmental problems. It is not as if there will be a cataclysmic end to world civilisation as we know it at some point in the 21st century. We shall see a growth in what we are told are natural disasters and a growth in environmental illnesses, poverty and hunger.

It falls to all Governments, particularly this Government, to consider whether their policies are perhaps unwittingly contributing to this process of environmental disaster. There are strict rules in this country, western Europe and the United States governing the dumping of toxic waste. Unfortunately, however, a large amount of the toxic waste that is not dumped, because of the tight regulations, is exported to poorer countries for disposal, with ensuing environmental damage.

We must consider carefully the control of all toxic waste and insist that it is not exported but is kept in this country where it can be disposed of safely. It should not be dumped on the poor people of the Third world who often lack the facilities to deal with it. There is something evil about offering toxic waste, which would cost more than $250 a tonne to dispose of in the United States, at a price of $40 a tonne to the people of poor countries. In some cases, the price offered to those people to deal with the toxic waste is greater than their gross national product. That shows how precious the wealthy countries of the world consider the disposal of such waste. Further action is required unless we are to see another incident such as that involving Karin B.

I wish to say a few words about debt and poverty in various parts of the world. Many of the environmental disasters in Brazil and elsewhere are a direct consequence of the debt crisis. Countries that are told that the only way that they can get themselves out of debt is to produce more cash crops for export to wealthy industrial countries more rapidly deplete their national resources, such as timber or anything else. They do so to increase their export revenue so that they can meet the rapidly rising interest rates of the World Bank and other financial institutions. This action contributes to environmental disaster. It serves to take wealth and resources from the Third world to the first world and the losers are the poor people of the poorest countries. Something must be done to stop the removal of wealth from the poorest countries to the richest, and that something is a world economy that does more than charge exorbitant interest rates to remove national resources from poor countries for the benefit of wealthy countries.

Many international agencies have tried, and continue to try, to do something about the important matters to which I have referred. The British Government left UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation—a few years ago. The Government are talking about returning when UNESCO is run in the way that is desired by the United States and Britain. I thought that the purpose of membership of an international agency was to participate in it, rather than dictate to it how it should be run. There is the United Nations environment programme. The total budget of the programme in 1986, the last year for which full accounts are available, was only $28 million, of which $1,471,000 was contributed by the British Government. It is the most woefully underfunded agency within the United Nations. It could be argued that it is the most vital of all the agencies. I hope that the Government will consider increasing Britain's contribution to it, increasing its powers and increasing its work. If they do not, we shall continue to see environmental disasters and continuing problems for the world's population. There is no room for complacency. It cannot be said that deregulation or free enterprise can solve the world's problems because they cannot. Instead they will lead to the destruction of the ozone layer, further pollution of the seas and, for example, destruction of the Antarctic.

I hope that the Government will be prepared to listen to the arguments and take them most seriously when they arise in the United Nations. I hope that the House will return to them on a full day's dabate.

1.33 pm

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for making it possible for a Conservative Member, who is neither a Privy Councillor nor a knight, to participate in the debate. I believe that I am only the second Conservative Member to come within this category.

I wish to refer to the middle east. I hesitate to pontificate on Israel's problems, for I have no qualifications or even ostensible reasons to do so. I am not a Jew and I have no Jewish votes in my constituency. I have no family or business connections with the middle east. If I presume to take an interest in it, it is because, ever since I was an undergraduate 25 years ago, I have considered the existence of the Jewish state of Israel to be an inspiring cause. It was and is a fitting outcome to centuries of pogrom, persecution and horror, culminating in the dreadful genocide of the Nazi beasts, that millions of Jews should live once again in their historic homeland. I make no opology for that deep emotional feeling. I know that many hon. Members feel differently and that their hearts go out to the plight of the Palestinian Arabs. I respect their honourable concern and I ask only that they should respect mine.

It is easy for us, sitting here, to forget the deep feelings of those who live with the problems all the time. Some of those problems are irreconcilable. There are religious or nationalistic fanatics on both sides who have bombs, guns and Molotov cocktails and are prepared to use them. There are others who answer terror with terror, and who have been inadequately punished and too speedily pardoned. Some of those Jewish fanatics view all Arabs as enemies to be mercilessly transferred—that is, deported —to live anywhere other than in the land of Israel. They are matched by Arabs whose blind hate festers in camps in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and elsewhere, dreaming of revenge for 1948 and a return to olive groves and houses that have long since been destroyed. Those are the people on both sides who are driving out moderation, frequently through violence or murder. Several brave Palestinians within the PLO wanted to talk to Israel, but they have been cut down by bullets fired by men like Abu Nidal and others who are interested only in victory, not in settlement.

All of us who know and love Israel have been distressed by what has happened in recent years. There has been unacceptable brutality and shameful scenes of repression. There can be no justification for the aimless beating of captives who have surrendered or who have been arrested during a riot. Whatever the provocation, whatever the Jewish outrage after terrorist incidents such as the fire-bombing of the bus in Jericho the other day, none of us who love Israel can for one moment condone such brutal repression. We are not blind to Israel's faults, but we recognise her strengths and her remarkable achievements.

There must be negotiations if Israel is to survive as the sort of country in which so many of us have long believed. There can be no future in permanent occupation of the west bank and Gaza. The Arab majority do not want them there and the famous "double D" equation of democracy and demography cannot indefinitely be ignored. If Israel is to remain a Jewish democratic state, it cannot indefinitely rule over 1·5 million hostile Arabs with no vote. Either the west bank and Gaza must be annexed, and the Arabs offered full Israeli citizenship, or the issue of self-rule for the Arabs must be grasped. The status quo cannot be an option.

Annexation would be wrong in principle and, ultimately, fatal to the Jewish state. Instead of facing that desperate dilemma, some Israeli politicians have taken refuge in the dread word "transfer." Others believe that the problem will be solved by millions more Jews flooding in from the Soviet Union or elsewhere to create more facts on

[Mr. Michael Latham]

the ground and so alter the demographic balance. Every serious student knows that those are impossible dreams and, for transfer, they are repulsive nightmares. The brutal language of Rabbi Kahane or the new Moledet party is light years away from the inspiring visions of the pioneers who struggled to build a modern democracy out of the ashes of Auschwitz.

On the question of the Palestine National Committee declaration in Algiers, the declared independence of Palestine is a less important part than the more or less explicit acceptance of resolutions 242 and 338, although without any unequivocal acceptance of Israel's right to exist and certainly without any promise of an end to violence. Nevertheless, it is certainly some progress. I do not believe that the Government should go overboard about it. They will doubtless wish to adhere to their usual policy of quiet and informal contact with the PLO at official level until there are considerably more forthcoming moves from the PLO towards public recognition of Israel and an end to violence. We certainly need to keep in close touch with the Bush Administration because of the important role that they play in this matter.

The difficulty of dealing with the PLO is twofold. First, it must explicitly accept Israel and stop the violence. Secondly, there is the question whether it can actually deliver a deal and, if so, whether it would be the sort of deal that Syria would tolerate or which any Government in Israel could accept and still last for more than five minutes. Since the Israeli elections, with their depressing outcome, and since the withdrawal of King Hussein—at least for the moment—from the scene, the position has become even more difficult. We can now forget about a United Nations international conference including the five members of the Security Council, which King Hussein wanted and which Mr. Peres and Mr. Schultz were prepared to accept. There is no support from Mr. Shamir and there is inadequate political backing in the Israeli electorate.

Further negotiations—and there must be such—need to involve the two super-powers and appropriate representatives of sovereign Arab countries, which can also include nominees of the PLO. At present, Israel will not sit down with the PLO, but she need not inquire too carefully into the antecedents of the Palestinians across the table. Mr. Arafat has plenty of experienced people whom he could use for that purpose and whose names are well known. Whether the Arab League, the Islamic Conference or some ad hoc grouping of Arab states is used for that purpose is not very important. It is a halfway house between bilateral negotiation and a United Nations-sponsored conference. The essential requirement is that the two super-powers are actively involved and that any Government of Israel can show their electorate that they are negotiating directly with sovereign Arab states and not solely with the PLO.

Israel is often told to speak to its enemies. The Arab League represents its enemies, and the PLO is part of it. Even if such negotiations can be set in motion—and it will need all the clout of the Americans and the Soviets to get Syria, Israel and the Palestinian deputation into the room at the same time—it is as well to be realistic about the negotiating aims. Heady talk from Algiers about a Palestinian independent state on the west bank and Gaza —incidentally, that has been rejected, of course, by Iran and the Syrian-backed rivals to the PLO—will not be a suitable basis for success.

The only realistic possibility involves, at least for the foreseeable future, a condominium of Jordan and the Palestinians, led by the PLO, over a demilitarised west bank and Gaza. Those are the outlines of a settlement which every serious student can perceive. Many of us must know in our hearts that there will be no independent PLO state of Palestine on the west bank and Gaza in the foreseeable future because no Israeli Government could accept such a thing and survive for five minutes.

There can be no Yamit style evacuation of Ariel, Kiryat Arba or other West Bank settlements, let alone dismantling the Gilos or Ramots of greater Jerusalem. Yamit, for example, was a fine town of 15,000 people. Now it is sand again in Egyptian Sinai, but the demolition of that new town was a strategic necessity that Israel accepted. Although Sinai was never part of biblical Eretz Israel, the evacuation of Yamit—I remember it well—brought almost intolerable strains on the Israeli democracy and it was carried through by a Likud Government led by Begin. No Israeli Government led by Shamir, Peres or a combination of either could peacefully evacuate and demolish west bank settlements, but sovereignty over them could, conceivably, pass to Jordan or be jointly shared by a condominium of Jordan and the Palestinians.

The way must be found for the Arabs of Nablus, Ramallah, Hebron, Khan Yunis and all the rest of them on the west bank and Gaza to rule themselves, but without their also ruling Jewish Ariel, Kedumin and Emmanuel. God knows it is a daunting, dreadful problem, even if the negotiations can ever be begun, let alone successfully completed, but we must try, and the sooner the better.

I wish to address my concluding remarks to my Jewish friends in Israel and in this country. There are some who do not care a fig what anyone else thinks, let alone listen to Gentiles such as I who do not live in Israel. There are many others who will bear to their dying day the unspeakable traumas of the holocaust, whether through personal involvement or the murders of loved ones. They will trust no one else with their own security. Perhaps there is nothing that I can say to them, except to respect their fears and concerns. There are hundreds of thousands of other Israelis, however, who wait fearfully every day for telephone calls about their sons and daughters patrolling with the Israeli defence forces in Hebron, Gaza city or indeed Galilee.

There are also others who have grown weary of international condemnation and of the constant strain of violence, war and terrorism. There are yet others who know in their hearts that concessions can be made for peace, just as they were successfully made in Sinai. They should make their voices heard, even though the election is over, as people of good will. Their voices should be echoed by hundreds of thousands of Arabs who are fed up with the squalid conditions, miserable lives and absent leaders who have achieved nothing for them in 40 years.

It is a shame that the phrase in which many of us believe has become the slogan of one small section of Israeli political society. I believe that that phrase should belong to all decent Israelis, except those on the repulsive and lunatic outer fringe. It should also belong to all moderate and sensible Arabs yearning for a better existence. It should be the slogan of world leaders, of Bush and Gorbachev, as well as King Hussein, Shamir, Peres and even Arafat—all those whose assent or acquiescence is vital for a lasting settlement. The words are simple and heartfelt and they are well known in Israel, "Peace now, before it is too late."

1.43 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I understand that the Front-Bench Members want to start their winding-up speeches at 1.50 pm. Time may prevent me from echoing what the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) said in his excellent speech. It was a thoughtful speech, which was delivered with sincerity. I listened with great interest, and I shall re-read with greater interest the points that he made.

I was disappointed with the content of the Queen's Speech on foreign affairs. A substantial chunk of the wording was directed towards foreign affairs, but it consisted largely of collective wishful thinking on the part of the Government. The real meat was on the second page where we got down to the legislative proposals that will affect us domestically. As we have lost a world role, this place now contemplates its legislative navel. We are about to get involved in a whole range of Bills that will do nothing to address, but will merely exacerbate, the country's problems, which have been created by the Government's policies.

I do not look for a return to the day when the country dominated the world militarily or economically, but I regret that we have so few chances to talk about world events. The Government do not seize the opportunities that our political and cultural traditions should give us —opportunities to influence world events more constructively than we do. We have a great deal to contribute to human experience. We could be visionary. Whatever is said about us, we remain a powerful, rich, influential nation capable of contributing greatly to the relief of world poverty, ignorance and enmity between nations. Indeed, we could solve such problems domestically if only the Government would turn their attention to them. Years of experience and expertise have produced enormous cultural and political respect for us around the world.

We could use those legacies, but instead we squander and abuse them under the leadership of a petty-minded xenophobe who struts around the world interfering and lecturing in her usual arrogant and high-handed manner. It is a pity that she does not spend a little more time going round this country and visiting the various communities of our inner-city areas to see the enormous and dangerous damage that her Government's policies have inflicted on so many of our people. She might try listening rather more than lecturing this and other nations. But I make those comments more in hope than in expectation.

In the past 18 months I have visited Nicaragua three times. The Government's attitude to Nicaragua emphasises the client-state status that we have in respect of United States foreign policy. I have heard the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State regularly say from the Dispatch Box that a political settlement in Nicaragua is needed, but never once has he or any of his Front-Bench colleagues voiced any criticism of United States policies there. There has been no word of condemnation about the mining of Nicaraguan territorial waters, the United States economic blockade of Nicaragua, or Contra terrorist forces being financed by the United States. We have heard not a word of open criticism because the Government dare not criticise. They are poodles of the United States when it comes to its policies on central America.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State never loses an opportunity to condemn Nicaragua, and if he were to reply today he would once again seize the opportunity to attack it. He says that Nicaragua is not complying with the terms of the Esquipulas accord, but he does not say anything about the death squads in El Salvador and Guatemala. In Nicaragua there are no death squads and no terrorist bases, but there are terrorist bases in Honduras. Instead of criticising those countries for their failure to meet the Guatemala peace accord provisions, he merely seizes every opportunity to attack Nicaragua.

We have had a debate and a series of questions on the damage caused to Nicaragua by hurricane Joan. The extent of the damage in Nicaragua is even greater than we first feared. Some 231,000 people, representing 6·4 per cent. of the population, have lost everything. Some of the worst damage has occurred within the bread-basket regions of that country. The hurricane has added problems to the already critical economic position. Nicaragua has been suffering the cost of aggression that amounts to almost $12,000 million and there have been 54,000 victims of United States-inspired terrorism led by the Contras. The damage has been enormous, yet, despite our close political and cultural links with Nicaragua, our contribution will be a measly £413,000, which includes the money that has come from the EEC.

Perhaps the Secretary of State for Defence or the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will advise me whether more money will be made available to Nicaragua. Will the Under-Secretary of State reconsider his decision not to visit that country when he tours central America next year? He says a great deal about Nicaragua. Perhaps he should visit that country to see the reality; we might then have a little more respect for him when he talks about it. I hope that those questions will be answered today, if not later. I assure the Under-Secretary of State that many Labour Members will return constantly to the subject of Nicaragua and the problems of central America.

1.50 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): When opening the debate the Foreign Secretary almost complained about the fact that part of it would be taken up by defence matters, but as the Gracious Speech linked the two subjects it is legitimate to take some time to discuss arms control and defence. I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman that foreign affairs debates are limited in length and frequency and that we should find more time for them. That would provide more opportunities for my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) to give the House more of his cool, thoughtful and moderate speeches. His speech today could be summed up, in the words of Ernest Bevan, as a tour d'horizon.

The debate has covered a wide range of topics. The stage was set by the opening speakers, so my remarks will relate to defence and arms control. There are few areas in which the gap between the rhetoric and the performance of the Government is wider. We have optimistic references in the Gracious Speech to support for the 50 per cent. cuts in strategic weapons in the United States and Soviet arsenals. We have yet to hear what will be the attitude of the

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

Government, as we approach the end of the first round of the strategic arms talks, to the Soviet suggestion that the United Kingdom should be involved in the second round. Perhaps the Soviets will place a condition on final agreement on the first round of British and French participation in the second round, as was envisaged at Reykjavik, when a further 50 per cent. of the nuclear arsenals will be subject to negotiation.

The Foreign Secretary made no meaningful reference to short-range and tactical weapons systems. The absence of concensus on modernising short-range and theatre weapons is one of the biggest problems confronting the Alliance, yet it appeared nowhere in the Foreign Secretary's speech. The agreement that was reached at Montebello about five years ago seems to have been made a long time ago in terms of the attitudes and priorities of the Alliance. The Secretary of State for Defence still bears the scars of the Monterey meeting shortly after the INF treaty was agreed, when he sought compensation for the cuts that that treaty envisaged. He was alone in the Alliance in seeking compensation and he returned so that his mistress could do better. She duly went to the NATO summit in March, when she sought to use her special relationship with President Reagan to secure consensus on modernisation.

As in so many instances, Chancellor Kohl arrived at Washington and spoke to President Reagan some time before the Prime Minister had even reached the starting blocks. We had the two communiques, one issued for European consumption and one for British consumption. The two did not add up to a consensus but were evidence of the wide gap between the British position on modernisation and the ambitions of the rest of Europe.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, when we went to the Federal Republic and spoke to what can be called all three sections of the German coalition, we found that there was no enthusiasm for the process of modernisation as envisagd by this Government. It would not be true to say that there is yet within the Federal Republic widespread support for a third zero, but it is clear that within the Bundeswehr and the Ministry of Defence in the Federal Republic there is at least some support for a 2¼ zero. If one goes to the Chancellor's office, one finds that the figure is about 2½ zero. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) referred to Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the Liberal Minister for Foreign Affairs. His proposition is clearer—he is certainly in the 2¾ zero position, getting towards the third zero position. In the most important European member of the Alliance, there is no enthusiasm for precipitate modernisation of those weapons systems.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Nevertheless, does not the hon. Gentleman think that the statement by Chancellor Kohl in the past few days about the modernisation of short-range nuclear forces is much more in line with the British Government's approach, and has he not had time to read it?

Mr. O'Neill: I am always reluctant to answer questions that start with the word "Nevertheless, does he not". I read the statement by Chancellor Kohl. His position is clear, that no decision will be taken until well after the general elections of 1990. That may be for internal political reasons, but it is nothing like as speedy a decision as would be required by our Prime Minister. I believe that it will be a major issue in the general elections. I suspect that there will not be a majority Government and that a coalition will be formed. They will have to put up with Mr. Genscher, and one of his conditions for support is that there will be little progress in modernisation well into the 1990s.

By then, the matter may have become academic in any case. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) made the point about the failure of the West to pick up President Gorbachev's offer of substantial cuts in conventional weaponry. The definition of disparities seems to lie at the heart of the delay—that was the impression that my right hon. Friend got when he spoke to the present United States Secretary of Defence. It was not the United States that was to blame for the failure to obtain a clear expression of the differences and disparities between the two blocs in Europe.

The latest defence Estimates show that in several areas there are considerable contradictions, for example, in main battle tanks. If one compares the figures quoted by the Ministry of Defence with those of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, one finds that according to the MOD figures there are 4,600 fewer NATO main battle tanks, 500 fewer NATO artillery systems, 7,230 more Warsaw pact anti-tank guided weapons systems and 730 more Warsaw pact tactical aircraft.

I want not to dwell on these details but to go behind them, and when we examine the problem of whether the beans that we are counting are the same on each side we are struck by the aridity of the Foreign Secretary's approach, which is so depressing. That is why we are concerned. We may be optimistic that an Alliance-wide application of the bean counting process may prove more realistic and honest than publications emanating from the Ministry of Defence. Since Gorbachev took power—between 1985 and 1988—the Soviet Union has increased the numbers of its main battle tanks in the central region more slowly than NATO. The Soviets have also cut the numbers of tactical aircraft at a greater rate than NATO. I could expand on these figures; suffice it to say that the information was given me by the Library and is freely available to anyone who wants confirmation.

In addition to these problems of conventional stability, there is the problem of how we will get to the negotiating table. In all the Foreign Secretary's remarks about the quality of the Alliance and the good relations with other European nations we heard nothing about the French involvement in winding up the CSCE and the relationship between NATO, the Warsaw pact countries and the non-aligned countries of Europe. This critical problem must be addressed. I cannot imagine that it was merely good manners on the Foreign Secretary's part that prevented him from mentioning the subject, and that he did not want to offend the French. I realise that he has quite a job building bridges to Europe after the damage done by the Bruges speech, but it is incumbent on the Defence Secretary to answer this point and to state the Government's attitude to these serious problems, which we hope can be nipped in the bud so that CSCE can be wound up, human rights and associated matters can be sorted out, and confidence-building measures can be put aside to enable the Warsaw pact and the 23 countries of NATO to consider the complicated issues of conventional stability as quickly as possible so that consultations may be held which can then be reported back to the other seven interested nations.

In the context of conventional arms we do not want the sort of haphazard cuts that have been made in British defences and which will continue to be made. The Gracious Speech did not mention defence expenditure, but the Prime Minister referred to an increase of more than £1 billion over the next three years——

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Younger): One billion pounds a year.

Mr. O'Neill: This increase in no way repairs the damage done over the past few years. Between 1984-85 and 1988-89 there has been a cut in real terms of 7·8 per cent.; between 1988-89 and 1991-92 there is likely to be a cut of 0·8 per cent. A likely increase of 1·7 per cent. will follow in 1991, and an increase of 1·3 per cent. in the year after that. Perhaps those figures are the basis of the Prime Minister's confident predictions, but they are based on an assumption of inflation running at 5 per cent. this year, 3·5 per cent. next year and 3 per cent. the year after. Today we heard an announcement of a 1 per cent. increase in interest rates and of the largest ever monthly trade deficit, which is likely to result in the largest ever annual trade deficit, so these figures can clearly be given no credence and the confident noises by the Prime Minister are no more than noises made to try to appease realistic anxieties felt by her Back Benchers.

At this time of problems with the trade deficit we should delay no longer the decision to buy British tanks from Vickers, a decision that should have been taken yesterday on the basis of merit and of a planned and constructive development of our procurement policy. Certainly, on occasions, trade deficits impact upon defence expenditure and defence considerations. However, there can be no justification whatever for trade deficits being used as an excuse for sending the Chancellor of the Duchy to Iraq to bolster some kind of trade delegation when we have appalling evidence of the nature of the war that is being waged against the Kurds.

The Government deserve a degree of credit for their persistence in pursuing a chemical weapons ban treaty. We wish them well and hope that the optimism of the Gracious Speech is borne out by events.

One of the relatively few encouraging points that came out of the American election was the speech by George Bush in Toledo. He went so far as to say that, if he could get nothing else out of his presidency—I hope to God that he can—he hopes to get some form of chemical weapons ban treaty over as wide an area of the world as possible.

There was one reference during the debate to something that would cost precious little. That is how my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) referred to it in his measured and compelling speech. He spoke about the national shame that we must feel about the unrepresentative nature of much of our armed forces. He said that, if we are to encourage the confidence of our people, the armed forces must be truly representative of all our people and of all the communities that make up our society.

There have been several references to the new thinking in the Soviet Union and to new opportunities. Then there were remarks such as, "But, on the other hand." We heard a speech to that effect from the right hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker). He made a characteristically thoughtful speech. I had some sympathy with much of it. He made constructive suggestions about the development of ways in which the Soviet Union could be brought to task. His views were echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). In one of his characteristic speeches, he laid on the line the need to have wholehearted commitment to the improvement of human rights, not only in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe but throughout the world.

The new thinking must be supported not only by statements in the House but by positive economic support. If perestroika is about anything, it is about economic construction, just as it is about social reconstruction. The Soviets are basically materialists. Their Communist philosophy is basically economistic in its first application. With wealthy countries, we must seek a means of providing support for the best efforts of the Soviet Union.

It is a shame today that the Foreign Secretary has avoided the opportunity of backing Chancellor Kohl's suggestion that we should look towards new forms of economic assistance that would help and encourage the Soviet Union and encourage the economy of Eastern Europe. We are some considerable time and distance from the conditions that resulted in the COCOM arrangements. We should seek to assist the Soviet Union. At this time there are opportunities for new thinking and for new approaches to the problems of peace and disarmament. I am afraid to say that there is precious little in the Gracious Speech that suggests that there is evidence of new thinking on the part of the Government.

2.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Younger): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neil) for his opening remarks. Having one day in the debate on the Gracious Speech to discuss defence and foreign affairs is almost traditional and is welcome to all of us. Although today's debate has not been entirely balanced between foreign affairs and defence, it has nevertheless been an opportunity for both of these important subjects to be aired in the House.

The Gracious Speech has emphasised again the importance that the Government attach to the maintenance of our country's defences and our membership of NATO. That has been a constant theme of much that has been said in the debate. The speeches made by hon. Members of all parties have been of great interest and I hope to say a few general words first, and then to do the best I can to meet the suggestion put forward by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and to answer as many as possible of the points that have been raised.

I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, who said—I think truthfully—that today there is great optimism in international affairs. It is widely thought that that is so, and that is the general atmosphere and attitude in any country that one visits.

Forty years ago, western European nations, struggling to recover from the devastation of a world war and threatened by the military might of a Soviet Union which was blatantly engaged in installing puppet regimes in the countries of eastern Europe, took an historic step. The

[Mr. George Younger]

Governments of Britain, France and the Benelux countries signed the Brussels treaty committing themselves to building a common defence system.

As hon. Members know, that initiative led directly to the formation of NATO—the 40th anniversary of which we shall celebrate next year. We have much to celebrate, including the continued membership of all NATO's original members, despite many strains over the years and far-reaching changes in its strategy and the expansion of the Alliance to encompass most of the free nations of Europe. Most of all, we shall be celebrating next April peace—the peace which NATO has guaranteed throughout these intervening 40 years.

It was Ernest Bevin who said in 1948:

> "If we are to preserve peace and our own safety at the same time we can only do so by the mobilisation of such a moral and material force as will create confidence in the west and inspire respect elsewhere".

NATO has fulfilled those criteria admirably.

The resolve shown by the Alliance in recent years was rewarded with the INF agreement and the start of a process which, for the first time, will lead to the elimination of an entire class of nuclear weapons. It gave me particular pleasure to visit RAF Molesworth in September to witness the removal of the first cruise missiles from western Europe under the terms of the treaty.

The lessons learned during the long years while the Soviet Union refused to negotiate seriously about arms control should not be forgotten now that a more realistic outlook and less aggressive stance appear to have been adopted by the Soviet leaders.

The security of this country and the other NATO nations is vital and demands a sober approach to arms control negotiations, not an uncritical embrace of superficially attractive proposals.

Mr. Heffer: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Brazier: The hon. Gentleman has already made a speech.

Mr. Heffer: Are you the Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

Mr. Heffer: I should like to ask the Secretary of State a question about NATO. Is he really suggesting that it was good that the Greek colonels could use NATO weapons to suppress democracy in Greece and that the Turks could use NATO weapons to invade Cyprus?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman knows that those events happened some time ago. NATO made its position clear at the time. The good thing is that both those countries have survived those experiences and are still in NATO.

Only last Wednesday Dr. Worner, the Secretary General of NATO, emphasised the importance of maintaining strong modern forces in the Alastair Buchan memorial lecture which he delivered in London to the International Institute for Strategic Studies. He remarked:

> "It would be very odd if the Alliance were to jeopardise its policy of deterrence just at a time when there are prospects of making the Soviet leadership understand the importance of its contribution to maintaining . . . stability in Europe . . ."

We are cautiously optimistic about the possibility of securing further arms control agreements, particularly on conventional and strategic nuclear forces. It is disturbing that, despite Mr. Gorbachev's talk of "reasonable sufficiency" in defence, we have not yet seen any evidence of a slowing down in the rate at which the Soviet Union is modernising its own forces or, as my right hon. and learned Friend said in his opening remarks, a reduction in those forces, which are grossly in excess of what might legitimately be needed for defence. We have not seen a diversion of resources from the military to the civil sector, although it is rightly said to be one of Mr. Gorbachev's aims. We have not seen a change in the structure of Warsaw pact forces, which remain organised for large-scale offensive action. While this capability for aggression exists, it is vital that the West should keep up its guard.

There are some signs of change. Defence Secretary Carlucci has sat in the cockpit of a Blackjack bomber, and MiG 29 Fulcrum aircraft took part in this year's Farnborough air show.

The exchange of visits this summer between Porton Down and the Soviet chemical warfare establishment at Shikany provided an opportunity for the Soviet Union to be more forthcoming about its chemical weapon capabilities.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary reminded the House in his opening speech, a global ban on chemical weapons is a goal to which we attach a high priorty. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Clackmannan for mentioning that he appreciated that point. The Soviet Union possesses the world's largest and most comprehensive chemical warfare capability. It is right that we should look to it to give a lead in the negotiations to eliminate these inhuman weapons. We require greater openness from it to ensure that the complex problems of verificaton of any agreement could be met.

In this context, the fact that the visit to Shikany took place at all is encouraging, but while we showed considerable openness during the Soviet visit to the chemical defence establishment at Porton Down, the return visit revealed that the Soviets still take a different approach to secrecy. The helicopter overflight did not afford a view of the whole site, many of our questions were either evaded or not answered at all and access was denied to a facility which commercially available satellite photographs clearly indicated was closely connected to the Shikany complex. So, although the exchange of visits was a step forward, the Soviet Union will have to be far more open about its chemical weapons and other capabilities before we can have the confidence necessary for further arms control agreements.

In the meantime, we must take every step necessary to preserve our security. We must maintain a strong defence, and continue to invest in up-to-date forces, both conventional and nuclear. The importance that this Government attach to defence is demonstrated by our record. Defence spending last year was more than one fifth higher in real terms than when we took office. We have ordered 64 new vessels for the fleet, seven regiments of Challenger tanks and 23 battalions of armoured vehicles for the Army, and 500 new aircraft for the RAF. I am pleased to announce further today that the main development the day before contracts for the European fighter aircraft were signed yesterday in Munich. These contracts are a major step towards producing this advanced, agile fighter, which will enter service with the RAF in the 1990s.

The strength of our commitment to defence was re-emphasised earlier this month when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced substantial additions to prevous defence spending plans as a result of which the budget will now be growing by about £1 billion a year over the next three years. We intend to ensure that these extra resources are used effectively. Our drive to pursue value for money will continue—in the procurement of defence equipment and the management of defence.

Mr. O'Neill: Is the £1 billion per annum in real terms? If it is, will the Secretary of State confirm that that will be an increase of about 5 per cent. per annum?

Mr. Younger: I can confirm that the £1 billion extra each year is in cash terms. The figure in real terms is approximately an average of 1 per cent. growth per annum. that is much better than most of our NATO allies.

Mr. Kaufman: The Minister talks about real term growth. What are the inflation assumptions?

Mr. Younger: They are the same as for all the rest of public expenditure published in the expenditure White Paper. Therefore, it is certain that they are pari passu with the rest of the public expenditure provisions. We expect that to be a healthy and useful addition to the defence budget.

The money devoted to defence is not the whole story. We rely critically on the courage, efficiency and dedication of the members of our armed services. We see these qualities most obviously in the fight against terrorism. The contribution that the services make to preserving the peace in Northern Ireland against a vicious and ruthless enemy deserves our wholehearted admiration and gratitude. Our service people also contribute to internatinal peace keeping. A contingent serves in Egypt with the Sinai-based multinational force and observers group. Another contingent serves with the United Nations forces in Cyprus.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said earlier, our naval forces remain on patrol in the Gulf. In the two years up to the beginning of this month, when the Armilla patrol stopped accompanying entitled merchant ships, they had accompanied over 1,000 merchant vessels through the Strait of Hormuz, more than all the other Western navies put together. No merchant vessels have been attacked while in company with warships of the patrol. This is a magnificent record.

I am grateful to hon. Members who have contributed to make this a valuable and interesting debate. I am afraid that I cannot extend all of that fulsome praise to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). With respect to the right hon. Gentleman, I thought that his speech was thoroughly unworthy of the Front-Bench spokesman of a major political party. However, to be a little more generous to him, I have to say that he had an extremely unenviable task because speaking in a debate on defence and foreign affairs for a party that has a policy neither on defence nor on foreign affairs would tax the most skilled foreign affairs spokesman. The right hon. Gentleman did not reach the standard that he should have reached.

The right hon. Member for Gorton commented on the speech that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made in Bruges. In those comments, the right hon. Gentleman was at his most waspish and unconvincing. He fought tooth and nail the Single European Act, and it is a bit rich for him to offer us lessons on how we should interpret it. That point was well made by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber.

The Single European Act sets out how decisions are to be taken to build up the kind of Europe that all member states want to see. It does not say or try to say what those decisions should be. Perhaps the Opposition have not fully appreciated that. The Prime Minister's speech at Bruges was a strong statement of Britain's commitment to Europe. She said, "Our destiny is in Europe". It was also a strong statement of the kind of Europe that Britain wants to see, one that is more interested in building prosperity than in building castles in the air. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) said, that vision is widely shared by the other member states.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) asked about the BBC world service, but he was very wide of the mark. To hear the hon. Gentleman one would think that the world service had virtually been wound up. The BBC world service has had a 40 per cent. increase in funding in real terms since 1979-80, and output has increased from 711 hours per week in 1979 to more than 767 hours per week now. The Government have already spent about £90 million on improving audibility, and capital funding will continue on the implementation of a 10-year audibility programme. The British Council has been given an extra £6 million for the financial year 1989-90, and that is a 10 per cent. increase in real terms in the direct grant that it receives from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. That means that the mixed money grant as a whole will be more than 7 per cent. higher in 1989-90 in real terms than it was this year.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Younger: I am sorry, but I wish to press on.

We are always pleased to see in these debates the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey). His speech was delightful, except in the middle section where I fear that he ran out of material. It was much more entertaining in the middle but was devoid of content.

I wish to say a few words about the conventional stability talks to which the right hon. Member for Leeds, East rightly referred. We want those talks between the 23 members of NATO and the Warsaw pact to start as soon as possible. It is fair to say that we have played a leading role in discussions in Vienna on a mandate for those talks. The broad objectives of the Alliance for the forthcoming talks have already been agreed by NATO Heads of Government at their last summit, and we want to present to the Vienna meeting a substantive and balanced document. Progress on human rights is also important. It is thanks to Western efforts that we have come a long way on that subject.

The right hon. Gentleman also suggested that the NATO nations were entering a period of unilateral disarmament within NATO as a result of budgetary pressures. Of course, he is right that there were budgetary pressures. I have no doubt that the NATO Alliance collectively over the past nine years has made progress, thanks to the influence of the Government, and successively maintained a policy of deterring aggression through sustaining the strength of its nuclear and

[Mr. Younger]

conventional forces. Many NATO nations have achieved real growth following the lead given by the United States and the United Kingdom, which has permitted a substantial investment in modern and effective weapon systems, overwhelmingly in the conventional field.

In the case of the United Kingdom, it is now clear that we are back on the path of sustained real growth in the defence budget and there are encouraging signs in other NATO nations, such as Norway and Germany. We attach great importance to the continued commitment of American forces in Europe which is vital to European security. I am sure that the United States Administration, under President-elect Bush, will understand fully the importance of that commitment and the need to maintain it. We should not be rushed, as the right hon. Gentleman wished, into hasty or unilateral reductions. The goal is to tackle the massive Soviet superiority, a policy that we can follow only from a position of adequate strength.

I also wish to respond to the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson). As the House is aware, we are considering the options for replacing the Chieftain tank. Ministers had a first meeting to discuss that yesterday, as widely mentioned, and it is a difficult procurement matter. No decisions were taken. Further work is required and has now been put in hand. It is still our intention to reach a decision on that by the end of the year.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Younger: I must press on.

I must also congratulate the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) on raising the issue of the results of the first year of ethnic monitoring of applicants and recruits to the armed services. I listened with great interest to his balanced and valuable speech. I can assure him that the armed services go to considerable lengths to ensure that their recruiting efforts reach all ethnic groups and that their selection procedures are without bias. In the light of the results of the initial survey, I wholly accept that further action is required, and we are already fully committed to such action.

The next step is to establish the reasons for the low rate of applications from ethnic minorities and the lower success rates when they occur. We are seeking the views of the Commission for Racial Equality and of the members of the Home Secretary's advisory council on race relations on how best to carry that work forward. I take the hon. Gentleman's point that we have an obligation not merely to be even-handed in this, but to appear to be over even-handed.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber raised the question of modernisation and force restructuring. To maintain deterrence at a minimum level of forces in the face of the Soviets' continuing modernisation of their own forces, including their short-range nuclear systems, we have to ensure continually that our forces are effective, responsive and survivable. The process of modernisation and restructuring the Alliance's forces will in no way undercut the real reduction in NATO's land-based nuclear weapons resulting from the implementation of the INF agreement.

NATO will continue to maintain only the minimum level of forces consistent with credible deterrence. The NATO nuclear stockpile in Europe is consistent with that. It is today at its lowest level for 20 years and has been reduced by 35 per cent. since 1979. That shows that our policy is working in the face of the need to keep a strong defence and to base upon that further armaments reductions. It is delivering a reduction in nuclear weapons when all previous attempts at such a policy did not succeed.

I hope that the House will give warm support to the Government for their continued pursuit of future reductions in nuclear weapons and the abolition of all chemical weapons throughout the world, and to do so from a position of strength. The Government have been able to provide that strength and to establish a firm basis from which to negotiate reductions in armaments. Without that strength, I am convinced that we would never have had the reductions. With it, we can say that it is a highly successful policy.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday 28 November.

Asbestos Pollution and Mesothelioma

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Yesterday evening I visited Mr. Walter Evans, a pensioner living in my constituency, who, at 68 years of age, is seriously ill from mesothelioma, which is an asbestos-related cancer. In 1976, he lost a lung. For the past seven weeks he has been struggling to breathe with the help of a nebulizer machine beside his bed in the front room of his home. Mr. Evans had the misfortune to live in Old row, Armley, in my constituency, from 1939 until the 1970s. He lived close to the asbestos factory of J W Roberts. He can tell the story of how his wife used to wipe the greyish white dust off the window sills of their home at 9.30 am, and that an hour later, if the machines at Roberts were blowing out dust, there would be another layer of dust half an inch thick.

A neighbour of his grew up in Arley place, which is nearby, and he is now 44 years of age. Both his father, who died at 50, and his mother at 53, were certified as dying of lung cancer. In the case of his mother, there was tearing of the stomach lining. He described how as young children they played in the dust. They scooped up the dust into piles with their hands to kick the little mounds down, he said. Others who went to the nearby Armley clock primary school described how the playground was always covered in dust. Children wrote their names in the dust. The girls marked out the hopscotch squares in the dust.

Another resident, Mrs. Shires, recalled:

> "If you walked right behind the factory it was like cotton. It was in the cracks in the pavement behind the factory."

Mrs. Annie Muscroft of Nunnington terrace has said:

> "It used to be blue-white. We used to sweep this blue dust up. It was blue fluffy stuff."

Jack Peat of Nunnington terrace has said:

> "The dust was always there while I was at school, lying on walls or window ledges if it had been damp. It was like snow fall."

Mrs. Annie Hall of Arley place recalls:

> "I used to get up in the morning and the other side of the street always had a layer of fine dust with footmarks on it from the early morning workers."

That dust is now proving to have been the cause of mesothelioma. It is a comparatively rare but deadly cancer of the lining of the lung and stomach. The only known cause of it is exposure, even for the briefest of periods, to asbestos dust. The disease can lie dormant for 50 years. There is no known cure. Once the tumour develops, a life is usually shortened to death within two years. In an area of west Leeds, Armley, within a half-mile radius of the Roberts asbestos factory, hundreds of residents in the surrounding terraced streets, which run right up against the factory walls, regularly encountered dust from the Roberts factory until it was closed in 1958, after operating for 70 years.

We are indebted to Mr. Richard Taylor, a reporter with the *Yorkshire Evening Post,* who, in the best traditions of investigative journalism, carefuly followed up routine coverage of the Leeds coroner's court reports about four years ago. He detected and traced a pattern in the past few years of an incredibly high incidence of mesothelioma deaths in Armley around the Roberts factory. A series of revealing articles were published in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* in the past year, which I have forwarded to the key Government Departments. Richard Taylor put a magnifying glass over the densely populated inner-city area near the Roberts factory. He examined death certificates and interviewed relatives and neighbours of the deceased. His evidence showed an incredibly high incidence of mesothelioma, and that was backed by the Leeds coroner's records.

Coroner Gill identified 22 deaths from mesothelioma between 1977 and 1988. There are now 29 identified cases. Being revealed is a pattern of death from mesothelioma for people who lived close to the Roberts factory. Coroner Gill commented:

> "It was only as a trend over a number of years that a more precise picture appeared. I have very few other cases from other areas of Leeds. It is significant that virtually all the cases we have come from that area."

Mr. Alfred Herod moved to Arksey terrace with his parents in 1936 and lived there until 1948. His wife recalls that as a child he used to get a good hiding for coming home covered in dust. They moved from Armley in 1964. He fell ill and died in June 1965, aged 34.

Mr. Ronald Huby lived a few doors away from Mr. Herod from 1932, when he was two years old, until he married in 1953. Like the others, he lived with the dust, never imagining that it could cause harm. In 1976, he began to experience difficulty in breathing and died in 1978, aged 48, of mesothelioma. Before he died he urged his wife to press for compensation, but neither she nor Mr. Herod received any. Mrs. Herod was refused legal aid and, like many others, could not face the prospect of lengthy and expensive legal proceedings against a factory that had closed.

The *Yorkshire Evening Post* names many others who have died in their late 50s or early 60s—for most of whom the only connection with asbestos was through living close to the Roberts factory. It appears from the evidence of such an intense mesothelioma cluster that the factory had, and is still having, a lethal impact on the people in its neighbourhood. One of Britain's leading experts on asbestos said that the Roberts factory is proving to be one of the most environmentally dangerous in the country. Families have paid, and are still paying, a high price for living near it.

Although mesothelioma is increasingly appearing on the death certificates of people known to have lived near the Roberts factory—and the disease can be dormant for decades before it strikes—deaths from contact with asbestos dust are not recorded as such. There are many death certificates that state bronchial pneumonia, tuberculosis or emphysema. Most deaths do not have an inquest or a post mortem, so many people may have died of mesothelioma unacknowledged.

The facts about asbestos have been known for nearly a century. In 1894 a factory inspectorate report provided the first warnings that exposure to asbestos could mean health danger and premature deaths. By 1931, the danger of asbestos was so apparent that the Government passed asbestos regulations directing that there should be no asbestos dust in the workplace. By 1935, the link between lung cancer and asbestos was clearly recognised. In 1969, the Government introduced new regulations fixing what were then called "safe dust levels." As we know, in 1985 the Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations, the Asbestos Licensing Regulations and the Asbestos Products Safety Regulations all came into effect.

[Mr. John Battle]

Recently, I received a helpful statement from the Under-Secretary of State at the former Department of Health and Social Security, the noble Lord Skelmersdale. In response to my letter, dated 15 March, he said:

> "Research supports an association between residence and school attendance but no occupational exposure near asbestos factories and malignant mesothelioma. In the particular context of Armley, the greater awareness of this condition by physicians, surgeons and pathologists may well contribute to the number of cases observed."

I agree with that, but must challenge the next sentence, which stated:

> "It was only subsequent to the early 1960s that mesothelioma hazard associated with asbestos exposure was recognised."

The JW Roberts factory in Armley was a world producer of asbestos-based goods for 70 years until operations ceased on site in 1958. It was one of the four founder members of Turner and Newall Ltd., now known as T and N plc. This was a well-established major local employer, but by March 1928 Dr. H. De Carle Woodcock —a well-known lung specialist—drew attention, at the inquest of Walter Leadbeater of Aviary mount in Armley, to the inhalation of asbestos dust as the cause of fibrosis of the lungs.

In August 1928 the Leeds coroner adjourned an inquest on Margaret Marden who died at the age of 34. She worked at Roberts and her symptoms pointed to asbestos poisoning. It is reported that the inquest was adjourned so that the coroner could pay a personal visit to the factory and obtain expert medical opinion. At the same inquest the assistant police surgeon, Dr. John Kelly, pointed out that it would take 10 to 12 years for asbestos disease to manifest itself.

In February 1929 Mrs. Lily Hensley, aged 41, died and the coroner suggested that the jury return a verdict of death from the inhalation of asbestos dust. Mrs. Hensley had worked at the Roberts factory for 20 years. At the time of her death her mother reported that steps had been taken at the asbestos works to prevent the dust floating about, but that was after her daughter had ceased to work there. Therefore, the danger to employees from asbestos dust was acknowledged many years before 1960.

JW Roberts still exists as a constituent part of T and N plc. In its 1987 annual report and accounts there is an interesting note to the accounts on page 32:

> "The company and certain subsidiaries are among many companies named as defendants in a large number of court actions concerned with alleged asbestos-related diseases in the USA and are among a number of defendants to claims in the UK from employees and former employees. Because of the slow onset of these diseases the directors expect that similar claims will be made in future years."

Mesothelioma, as a result of exposure to asbestos dust, is not an "alleged asbestos-related disease"; it is a proven one.

The notes to the 1987 annual accounts also include the following budget line on page 23:

> "Asbestos-related disease claims, including legal costs for 1987—£5·1 million".

How much of this has been paid to former employees and their families? I do not know, but claims have been made and there are rumours of out-of-court settlements. But local people who did not work at Roberts, whose relatives have died from mesothelioma as a result of living nearby or who may now have the disease, want to know if they can claim any recompense from the company.

In reply to my inquiry to the Lord Chancellor's Department, the issue of damages at civil law was raised. The reply reads:

> "I am unaware of any case in which people who live or have lived near a factory, as opposed to workers at the factory, have received damages for diseases caused by asbestos. However, there is nothing in law which would prohibit such people from bringing a claim for negligence against the proprietor. The success or failure of such a claim would depend, as it does in all negligence actions, on the answers to such questions as whether the company knew or should have known of the dangers; whether they took all reasonably practicable steps to limit or remove the dangers; whether it was foreseeable that the plaintiff would develop the disease, and whether the disease was in fact caused by the defendant's breach of duties.
>
> A further question to be considered would be whether the claim was barred under the Limitation Act. It would no doubt be easier for an employee to prove a case of negligence, particularly since there are statutory duties on an employer towards his employees which he does not owe to others."

It is precisely those "others" that I represent in the House. People such as Mr. Evans face difficulties in even considering taking out court action against T and N plc. It is also clear that the cases of some former employees have dragged on so long that the dying person has never lived to see the end of it. In the light of that, I appeal to the Minister to use his powers to initiate a full-scale inquiry into the mesothelioma deaths of people who lived in Armley near the Roberts factory. Will the Minister ask the Health and Safety Executive to prepare what I think is known as an "occasional report" as a starting point, and use it as a focus to initiate a Government inquiry that co-ordinates the resources within the range of Government Departments, particularly the Department of Employment, drawing on the expertise of that executive, the Department of Health, the Department of the Environment and the Lord Chancellor's Department?

I appreciate that the scale of this environmental pollution is much wider than the remit of the Health and Safety Executive. The full picture of local residents who live there and who have died or moved away and of the children who attended the Armley clock primary school still needs to be compiled from electoral rolls, school registers and health records. Could not the Department of Health, for example, be asked to send a circular to all coroners and health authorities to seek out recorded deaths from mesothelioma with a view to finding those who lived close to the Roberts factory at Armley? Only then can the extent of the tragic impact of its presence be properly assessed.

The scientific link between mesothelioma and asbestos dust from Roberts needs to be firmly established beyond doubt from contemporary history and medical evidence. Nor should the dormant period of the disease be a barrier to seeking recompense against a factory that closed in 1958, but which is part of a continuing and successful company with a turnover of £961 million and whose profits before taxation in 1987 increased by 73 per cent. to £77·3 million.

The relatives of those who have died and who are dying seek recompense for the painful shortening of life by mesothelioma. They know, as is acknowledged in the Turner and Newall annual report, that the company faces huge claims for compensation from the Chase Manhattan bank and the Prudential Insurance company in the United States, but they do not have the means to stake their claim as those companies do. They want to know how they, too, can be included in the note to the accounts in Turner and

Newall's annual report headed, "Asbestos-related disease claims." I urge the Minister to initiate an inquiry and to ensure that all its documentation and findings are made available as evidence to be used in any civil action that may take place.

Scientific developments based on experiment will always include risks and tragic discoveries. There is a tragic irony in the picture of Lady Asbestos as a Greek goddess and symbol of protection which was first used in 1918 in publicity material produced by Turner Brothers Asbestos. The tragedy is that that shield of protection against the elements has proved to be such a lethal weapon, killing thousands painfully and prematurely.

A key question, highlighted in the Lord Chancellor's letter, remains and that is whether the company knew or should have known of the danger. On 6 December a Yorkshire Television documentary, "First Tuesday", which has conducted major research on the tragic legacy of the Armley asbestos factory, may address this question. For my part, I frequently walk and drive the streets around that old factory building, visiting my constituents. I cannot believe that those who owned and ran Roberts can have gone in and out without seeing the dust everywhere on the surrounding streets and pavements. If they knew that their workers within had to be protected from the asbestos dust, how could they have ignored the position of their neighbours who lived with that dust outside? It was not rendered neutral or innocuous as it left their premises.

If they knew, why did they knowingly continue to ask not only their employees but local residents for a generation to pay the price with their lives for the profits of continued asbestos production? Is not the price of a life, albeit by a delayed reaction, too high a price to pay? Should not the company be responsible for that deadly legacy? The Armley asbestos tragedy cannot remain private and hidden because it is not yet over.

I urge the Minister to ask for a Health and Safety Executive report, to initiate a full-scale inquiry and to use his powers to ensure that all documentation can be made available in any action relating to claims for recompense by those who have inherited that deadly legacy, be they my constituents or—because they may have moved from Armley—the constituents of other hon. Members.

2.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick Nicholls): I compliment the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on the way in which he has brought this important subject before the House and I extend my personal thanks for his courtesy in giving me an idea of the way in which he intended to raise the matter.

The hon. Gentleman laid out a catalogue of misery and death with which he and his constituents have had to live. I am all too keenly aware that, whatever the cause of those deaths may have been, even a debate on the Floor of the House may seem an inadequate reaction.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned several important subjects that I shall do my best to cover. I fully appreciate that compensation for people whose health has been affected by such circumstances is a grave and major problem. Equally, nothing that I say could make up for the loss of good health or the suffering or death of a husband, wife, parent or child. It is possible that the families of those who have died as a result of living near an asbestos factory may be able to obtain compensation by claiming damages at civil law. If any of the hon. Gentleman's constituents have not already done so, I urge them to take legal advice.

The hon. Gentleman will accept that I cannot pass judgment on the individual circumstances of the Roberts factory in Leeds. The problems are compounded by the time lag of the disease and by the fact that sometimes such firms are no longer in business. The point that was made by the Lord Chancellor's Department is that, although it is easier to prove a case where statutory regulations exist, it does not mean that a case cannot be proved according to the general law. I make no apology for repeating that, if any of the hon. Gentleman's constituents have not yet taken legal advice—I cannot pass judgment on why a legal aid application may have been refused—they should do so now.

Employees who have contracted an asbestos-related disease during their work and whose employers have ceased to trade, can claim compensation under the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Protection) Act 1979.

The hon. Gentleman suggested conducting an inquiry to identify former residents of Armley who may be affected by the disease. I understand his reasons for suggesting that, but I wonder how useful it could be. First, it would be almost impossible to conduct such an exercise. The logistics of tracing and identifying such people are formidable. Not only was the factory in operation for more than 50 years, but it ceased operation more than 30 years ago. By now, people who lived in Armley during that period could be spread not just over the country but over the four corners of the globe. Furthermore, what could such an inquiry achieve? As the hon. Gentleman said, this tragic disease is incurable. Mounting a well-publicised search to identify potential sufferers may cause much needless concern among former residents, many of whom will be elderly.

I take this opportunity to address the long and complex story of asbestos, what we have learnt about its dangers and the controls that have been applied to its use. There is the related and broader question of protection for members of the public who live close to factories or other places where potentially dangerous activities are carried out.

Asbestos is a useful material, not least because it is chemically inert. It does not react easily with other substances and is not easily damaged or destroyed. For a long time it was also assumed to be biologically inert in its effects on the human body. Awareness of those effects grew slowly. That was partly because the cancers that we now know to be caused by asbestos do not usually appear until many years after the sufferer was exposed. Furthermore, they are often indistinguishable from cancers caused by other substances. That made asbestos hard to spot as the hazard that we know it is.

Those facts are important in the case of the Roberts works at Armley where production ceased in 1958. To understand fully the situation, we have to look at what was believed about asbestos at the time. Evidence that asbestos was harmful accumulated during the 1920s and 1930s. But attention was focused on its ability to produce asbestosis, a type of lung tissue damage, something like coal miners' dust disease. There was no suspicion that it could also cause cancers.

To protect process workers against the risk of asbestosis, the 1931 regulations were introduced. Their main requirement was that workers' exposure to asbestos

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

dust should be controlled by the use of exhaust ventilation equipment or protective clothing and breathing apparatus. It was still believed that there was a threshold level of exposure below which the risk vanished, and some processes were excluded from the 1931 regulations on that ground. The regulations, then, were based on the evidence available at the time, and that was the legislation that existed to protect the employees at the Roberts works up to the time of its closure in 1958.

The regulations did not extend to members of the public, and people living in the neighbourhood were covered only by the Public Health Act 1936 and civil law generally. That Act empowers local authorities to deal with statutory nuisance, including dust prejudicial to the health of or a nuisance to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

It is possible that there were escapes of dust from the Roberts works but, even if heavy by today's standards, they would almost certainly not have been judged prejudicial to health at the time. That is because the health risk was thought to be asbestosis, and it is highly improbable that dust levels in the open environment would ever be high enough to cause that disease. It is even hard to say whether the dust levels would have been considered a nuisance, but in any case steps taken to deal with mere nuisance would not have eliminated what we now know to be the real health risk.

The hon. Gentleman says that many of his constituents suffered from mesothelioma. That would suggest that blue asbestos, the sort most closely associated with mesothelioma, was being used. That is quite possible, although we do not know exactly what was being done at the factory. Nor do we have any data about actual asbestos exposure for either employees or members of the public nearby. At the time no one would have thought it worth collecting. To make matters worse, we cannot even check what might have happened by looking at factory inspectorate records for the period, because records from so long ago are not kept.

Since then, as many people will know, enormous changes have taken place. During the 1960s the link between asbestos and lung cancer became clearer and the 1931 regulations were replaced by the Asbestos Regulations 1969. However, those regulations were still confined to the protection of factory workers, and they still embodied the idea of a threshold level of exposure below which nothing more need be done. The regulations themselves did not specify the threshold, but separate control limits were set and the regulations were used to enforce those limits. It was not long before it began to appear that even those standards were not good enough. Crucially, it was realised that asbestos-induced lung cancer, and mesothelioma can both be caused by relatively low exposure.

With hindsight, of course, we can now see that the dust that escaped from the Roberts factory, and that may or may not have been considered a nuisance at that time, was sufficient to cause those diseases. But that had not been established in the years when the factory was in operation.

In 1976 the Health and Safety Commission set up the Advisory Committee on Asbestos, which reported in 1979. It recommended, among other things, that the assumption that there was a safe threshold should be dropped, and that control should be aimed at reducing exposure, as far as reasonably practicable. The control limits for white and brown asbestos were reduced. In 1983 the HSC called for another review of the medical evidence and the control limit for white asbestos was reduced again.

Nowadays, in contrast to what I said earlier, there would be no doubt in anyone's mind that asbestos dust was prejudicial to health and a statutory nuisance. I mentioned the possibility that blue asbestos had been used at the Roberts works, and its links with mesothelioma. Since the beginning of 1986 the use of both blue and brown asbestos has been prohibited altogether by the Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations. In fact, the control of exposure to blue asbestos had become so strict that its use had ceased long before.

I should emphasise that the dust emissions which seem to have been occurring at the Armley factory in Leeds could not happen under today's regime. One final area in which asbestos can cause concern is the demolition of buildings that have contained asbestos or an asbestos process in the past. Asbestos removal can be just as worrying. As well as being subject to all the legislation that I have mentioned, anyone now doing such work has to be licensed under the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983.

I have tried in my few remarks to give the background in a way that I hope will assist the hon. Gentleman. Anyone who listened to the debate must have been impressed by the detailed care that he gave the subject. If there are points that we need to pursue in correspondence, I shall be delighted to do so when I have had a chance to read his speech in *Hansard*.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 28 November 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Transport Studies (London)

1. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the different studies he has sponsored into transport proposals and problems in London; and what is their expected final cost.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Paul Channon): As the list is a long one, I shall arrange for the information to be published in the *Official Report*.

Ms. Abbott: Does the Secretary of State agree that there has been considerable criticism of the reports by professional organisations, including the Institution of Civil Engineers? Will he accept that, far from hatching plans to build more roads, in London, he should be considering the real concerns of the population of London —homes before roads, and safety before profit?

Mr. Channon: I think that the hon. Lady is referring to the assessment studies that are taking place in some parts of the capital. My aim for transport in London in general is to promote efficient and attractive public transport, better parking controls, new technology, trunk roads to take traffic round London and to support local authorities' road programmes. I do not think that anything will cut against the general thrust of that policy.

Mr. Higgins: Is my right hon. Friend aware that traffic problems in London were much better dealt with when they came under the direct authority of the Department of Transport? Given the real problems arising from bus lanes, coaches parking on roads and the appalling so-called traffic management schemes that were introduced at the Aldwych by the GLC, is it not high time that my right hon. Friend resumed responsibility for London transport?

Mr. Channon: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his constructive suggestion. Unfortunately, to implement it would require primary legislation. I have a suspicion that it would not exactly be non-controversial and might be rather difficult to get through the House. I have some sympathy, however, with what my right hon. Friend says.

Mr. Fraser: Does the Secretary of State travel on public transport in London? If so, does he not realise that massive public investment, without greed as a motive, is necessary if London is not to grind to a halt?

Mr. Channon: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need for massive investment. I am sure that he has noted with satisfaction the massive investment that has been provided under this Government, both for London Underground and British Rail. In real terms, the investment has been considerably higher than anything that was achieved when he and his right hon. and hon. Friends had anything to do with these matters.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that unless public and private transport continue to go through London at an adequate pace, industry will come to a stop, jobs will be lost and the entire metropolis will grind to a halt? Will he undertake to ensure that every measure possible is taken to get transport moving more quickly?

Mr. Channon: I shall do my best to achieve that. I am sure my hon. Friend agrees that, if we are to achieve what he has in mind, it is essential to provide better public transport in London. Also, I am sure he welcomes the fact that investment in London Underground is now 60 per cent. higher in real terms than it ever was under the GLC.

Mr. Prescott: Is the Secretary of State aware that, following various studies on safety within the London Transport system, reports continue to be made on fires, escalator breakdowns and inadequate safety procedures? Will he justify to the House his view, which was expressed to me in a letter, that an early debate on the Fennell report is not necessary, because of "the lengthy exchanges" that took place on the day of the statement on the report? Does he accept that the public will see this as a gross dereliction of his responsibilities, and will he reconsider?

Mr. Channon: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to have a debate on the issue, he has every opportunity to call for one. Such a debate in Government time is largely a matter for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. The House will know from what I said in my statement, which has been widely commented on, that every conceivable effort is being made to improve safety within the London Underground system. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman welcomes, as I do, the vast sums that are being expended on safety on London Underground. If the Opposition want a debate, the remedy is in their hands.

The information is as follows:

Current studies into transport issues in London and estimated cost

	£
1. The Department of Transport is currently sponsoring the following studies into transport issues in London:	
Stage 2 of the London Assessment Studies	4 million
Central London Rail Study with BR and LRT	300,000
A4/M4 Corridor Study	200,000
Trunk Road Signing Review	340,000
Development of Traffic Management and Accident Prevention Measures	1·3 million
Improvement and Enhancement of London Transportation Study Model	1 million
Company Assisted Travel	125,000

	Authority
2. The following studies in which the Department has an interest are also in progress:	
Docklands Public Transport Study	LRT/LDDC
Second Channel Tunnel Terminal	BR

3. The Department has also committed £186,000 to studies commissioned by Westminster City Council into ways of improving the environment and traffic conditions in Parliament Square.

Accident Statistics

2. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give figures for the number of fatal accidents involving heavy lorries for the last year for which figures are available.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Peter Bottomley): In 1987, 910 people were killed in the 776 accidents involving heavy goods vehicles. Fuller details will be published shortly in the casualty report "Road Accidents, Great Britain". Heavy goods vehicles are less likely to be involved in crashes, but more likely to be associated with fatalities.

Mr. Mullin: Is not the simplest way to reduce the number of people killed by heavy lorries to encourage freight to travel by rail again, or is that an ideologically unsound answer to a very serious problem?

Mr. Bottomley: That is a partial answer. One of the benefits of the Channel tunnel is that there will be a greater relative movement of freight by the railways as journeys become longer. However, the truth remains that, whether we are talking about cars, lorries or motor bikes, people are driving too close, too fast and with too little regard for others. It is no good my claiming that our casualty rates are improving, when I still have to give figures such as those that I have given today.

Mr. Gregory: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the major causes of those accidents is our very low tyre regulations in comparison with the rest of the EC? Will my hon. Friend consider carefully the possibility of our moving towards the EC draft directive, which states that tyre depth covers the whole of the tyre rather than just 75 per cent.?

Mr. Bottomley: My answer is no to the first part of my hon. Friend's question, and no to the second part. The Department and I have said that if anyone produces scientific evidence that the tread regulations are leading to a greater number of casualties, we will look at that evidence. In most cases Europe should be copying us, rather than the other way round.

M1 (Traffic Congestion)

3. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make a statement on new measures to relieve traffic congestion on the M1 motorway.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The opening of the M40 extension from Oxford to Birmingham will bring relief to the M1 between London and the M6. In addition, we are planning improvements to junction 1, a climbing lane at junction 9 and widening between junctions 23A and 24.

Mr. Janner: What will the Minister do to relieve the additional congestion which his announced measures will undoubtedly bring? Does he not realise that travellers on the M1 are afflicted by chronic, disgraceful and dangerous congestion, which leads to delays? In particular, will he please take steps to alleviate the congestion at the exit from the M1 at the city of Leicester?

Mr. Bottomley: My answer to the hon. and learned Gentleman's point is yes and we aim to provide traffic signals at junction 21 as a matter of urgency. With regard to his first point, the hon. and learned gentleman was a supporter of a Labour Government who, between 1974 and 1979, exactly halved spending on new national roads in real terms.

Mr. Marlow: As the only time that one can assess the journey time on the M1 these days is at the time of day when no one actually wants to travel on the M1, and as at any other time of the day one is beset by chronic congestion, could my hon. Friend, instead of saying that it is a terrible situation and no doubt the M40 will improve the situation, actually ask the Government, either to reduce economic growth so that we have less traffic on the road or, if he does not want to do that, produce the roads so that we can drive down them? We do not have them at the moment. Will he take whatever powers are necessary and get on with it?

Mr. Bottomley: I think that this is one of the occasions when I say that I do not know. I shall consider what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Tony Banks: What is the point of relieving traffic congestion on the M1 if cars just get into London quicker and then run into all the problems that we discussed in response to the first question today? Surely it is about time that the Minister realised that there is no coherent transport policy in his Department. Frankly, the Government Front Bench is in as much of a shambles as transport in our capital city.

Mr. Bottomley: I believe that the hon. Gentleman might discover from the next question that the M1 does more than feed commuter traffic into London. This is a far more serious issue than the hon. Gentleman has ever shown any sign of being aware of.

Mr. Madel: When will repairs to junction 8 by Hemel Hempstead be completed? At present, they are causing great chaos. Once we have dealt with junction 8, can we look forward to a period of no repairs on the M1 between Bedfordshire and London for a reasonable space of time?

Mr. Bottomley: The answer to my hon. Friend's first question is early December. In response to his second point, yes, we can look forward to that, but because so much of the road reconstruction work was not carried out under the previous Labour Government, we are having to catch up.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Does the Minister still subscribe to the departmental view that motorists must accept that journeys will not get quicker, but, if anything, become worse? That is what his Department says. Does he accept that the travelling public are heartily sick of congestion on the motorways and of ministerial excuses? Does he also accept that the idea of a good card fast lane for executives is ridiculous? The idea of means-testing motorways could come only from the present Government. Let us have some real planning for both public and private transport.

Mr. Bottomley: If planning is anything like that of the last Labour Government we shall not get very far very fast. Spending on new national roads rose by 30 per cent. in real terms in the first nine years of this Government, and is now planned to increase by another 20 per cent. If the thinness of the Opposition's arguments needs to be hidden behind the views of the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), the sooner that he gives way to his hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) as transport spokesman, the better.

Mr. Tredinnick: Is my hon. Friend aware of the chaos that gripped the midlands motorway system on Friday? Will he now consider the possibility of a second M1—an M1-super—which could be funded by the private sector?

Mr. Bottomley: Obviously, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the Department to review the motorway and trunk road network, and we shall be doing that. It would be nice to be able to get rid of more of the congestion between the cities, but let me say to those who were held up on Friday—or have been held up on other occasions—that it is necessary to get the right perspective. I am fed up with reading newspaper reports with such headlines as:

"Death Crash Causes Rush Hour Chaos".

We should be aware that often we are held up because another human being has lost his life in a road accident.

Journey Times

4. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current estimate of the time it takes a responsible motorist to drive during the day from Westminster to south Yorkshire on the A1; and how much this has changed relative to the estimated time of such a journey 10 years ago.

Mr. Bottomley: This information is not available.

We have steadily improved the A1 and plan further improvements.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister accept that considerable and increasing stretches of road for considerable and increasing periods resemble car parks rather than major arterial routes? Does he accept that the answer does not lie in delving into quite ancient history to reproduce the toll booth and the turnpike?

Mr. Bottomley: I am not aware that the toll booth and the turnpike have been appearing, except on some of our estuarial crossings. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, we have not closed our minds to the possibility of using private finance. Over the past 10 years many journeys in many parts of the country have become faster, more reliable and less congested. If people will start looking at the bypass programme—both the completed programmes and those that are continuing now—and at the 850 extra miles of road, they will see the benefits. If the hon. Gentleman wishes me to name one, let me name Okehampton.

Sir Anthony Grant: Is my hon. Friend aware that one of the factors affecting the time that it takes to travel from Westminster to Yorkshire on the A1 is the difficulty of driving through the extremely dangerous section that runs through my constituency, in which there have been some horrific accidents? When will my hon. Friend and the Department respond to the many representations made by me, and by Cambridgeshire county council, asking for something to be done about this horror spot?

Mr. Bottomley: We are doing what we can in Cambridgeshire, as well as in Bedfordshire and Nottinghamshire. I hope that local people will support rather than oppose some of the minor works closing gaps. We shall also do what we can to get on with grade separation.

Ms. Armstrong: Is the Minister aware that his answers to me during the last Transport questions on the A1 caused some confusion in the region? Can we now confidently look forward to the development of a three-lane motorway from the A1, which would then be able to carry properly the volume of traffic that it is now trying unsuccessfully to carry?

Mr. Bottomley: That is our intention. It is one of the reasons why we are concentrating on the A1 rather than going for an east coast motorway. Perhaps the best thing that I can do is write to the hon. Lady, so that there will be no confusion.

Road Surfaces (Coaches)

5. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the danger to road surfaces caused by passenger coaches.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have received no formal representations.

Less than 2 per cent. of road wear and tear on motorways in the United Kingdom is attributable to buses and coaches, and some 8 per cent. of road wear and tear to all United Kingdom roads.

Mr. Yeo: As wear and tear caused by passenger coaches is clearly much greater than that caused by ordinary passenger cars, does my hon. Friend agree that it is utterly ridiculous that the licence fee for coaches is less than that for private motor cars? That prevents any fair competition between rail and road. British Rail is expected to make a contribution to costs, but under present policies passenger coaches are not.

Mr. Bottomley: I think that these are issues that the Government should keep under review.

Mr. Adley: With respect, that answer is only half good enough. There were some useful side effects of coach deregulation, but the Metropolitan police have described the situation in London caused by coach deregulation as horrendous. Vehicle excise duty for a 53-seater coach is less than that for a Fiat Panda. Coaches park anywhere and pay nothing for it. They leave their engines running and cause major pollution. Will my hon. Friend review the Act that governs deregulation, not with the idea of scrapping it, but with a view of returning to the London boroughs the right to designate coach routes in London?

Mr. Bottomley: That is going slightly wide of the question, but it may be that these issues ought to be considered in some other way and in some other place.

Manchester Airport Rail Link

6. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received on the proposed Manchester airport rail link.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Michael Portillo): Officers of the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority and Executive discussed the matter with my officials on 1 November. Ministers will be happy to approve such an investment if there is a sound case.

Mr. Favell: Manchester airport is the fastest growing airport in Europe. Is not the pedestrian way in which British Rail is reacting to this wonderful investment opportunity typical of a nationalised concern? Is my hon. Friend, for whom I have the greatest regard, able to assure me that Manchester airport will be privatised as quickly as possible, so that this kind of thing is not repeated in the future?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend knows that the privatisation of British Rail is under consideration. If, however, the discussions go well, my hon. Friend should not have to wait for privatisation, if that is to occur. If there is a strong commercial case for it, as he believes, I shall be happy to approve the investment.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Is my hon. Friend aware of how important economically Manchester international airport is to the north-west region? Is he aware that today important talks are taking place in America about the prospects of more inter-continental flights into and out of Manchester airport that would be of great help to us? May I have his assurance that the Department is doing all that it can? If the flights into Manchester airport are approved, the rail link will be of even greater importance.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the discussions. United Kingdom and United States negotiators are meeting today and tomorrow to discuss these matters. We had hoped to be able to bring the discussions to a conclusion this week, but apparently the United States Government have said that they believe that the two teams may need to meet again, perhaps in December. We shall continue to press for progress to be made. Final agreement will depend partly on whether the United States Government are prepared to be flexible and are anxious to press for progress.

Mr. Snape: Is it not strange that the rail link into Stansted airport, which carries a fraction of the traffic carried at Manchester, has already commenced? Despite years of debate in the House, no work has yet been done on a rail link to Manchester airport. What has happened to the proposals? Have they been put forward for ministerial approval, and if not, why not?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that no work has been done on the rail link. An enormous amount of work has been done. I expect proposals to be put to me fairly soon, but they have not yet come before me. We are waiting for advice on the extent to which the additional revenue on the British Rail network will be offset by costs incurred in earning that revenue on the network. We shall consider the possible private sector role. We shall ask British Rail for a statement of its investment case. We shall also ask for a joint statement by the Passenger Transport Executive, the Passenger Transport Authority, British Rail and the airport on how the costs are to be shared. I believe that we are making good progress on all those matters.

Road Schemes (Finance)

8. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road schemes, under construction or planned, are being financed with private money.

Mr. Portillo: The privately financed Dartford-Thurrock crossing is now under construction. The private sector will have the opportunity to finance a second crossing of the River Severn in the forthcoming competition. Since April 1986 agreements have been made with private sector firms to contribute to the funding of 48 trunk road schemes. Local highway authorities are also entering into agreements with the private sector to finance a large number of local road schemes.

Mr. Mitchell: Is my hon. Friend aware that many hon. Members believe that there is a need for greater private sector involvement in road building and road operation, probably through the use of tolls, as a means of meeting the massive difficulties in building up the road infrastructure that is now needed, as well as meeting the massive demand for better roads?

Mr. Portillo: I share my hon. Friend's belief that there is great potential for the wider use of private sector funding to improve the efficiency of road building and potentially in helping to meet the public demand for roads through schemes that would not be built under the public sector programme. I recognise that such schemes might need to be funded by tolls.

Mrs. Ray Michie: Is the Minister aware that in Spain, where privatised roads have been greatly encouraged, the number of accidents on the parallel public roads has increased enormously? Does the Minister agree that privatised roads in this country would not solve our traffic problems in any way?

Mr. Portillo: I should like to investigate the evidence that the hon. Lady has put forward because many other factors may be involved. Of course I am keen that roads built in the private sector should be built to the same safety standards as those in the public sector. That goes without saying.

Mr. Baldry: Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to deny any suggestion that the M40 extension may be tolled, as suggested by Tarmac? Will he also take the opportunity to confirm a suggestion in *The Times* today, which seemed to be based on a reasonably authoritative leak, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will announce in the new year that the M40 will be three lanes throughout? I am sure that the House would like that to be confirmed.

Mr. Portillo: We had better wait until the new year to confirm what my right hon. Friend may have to say. I believe that the proposal from Tarmac was made by an individual in the company. Nobody has offered money for the M40 to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Prescott: Can the Minister confirm that British road expenditure, expressed as a percentage of the vehicle excise duty collected, has declined from 35 per cent. under the Labour Government to 25 per cent. now, which is the lowest in Europe? Does he accept that if the Government had maintained the same proportion of taxation expenditure on roads as the Labour Government we could have spent £2 billion more on our inadequate roads, rather than on funding tax cuts for the wealthy?

Mr. Portillo: Road spending this year is 30 per cent. higher than in the last year of the Labour Government.

A38 (Saltash-Trerulefoot)

9. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will include the A38 trunk road improvement Saltash-Trerulefoot section in the 1992 to 1994 roads programmes.

Mr. Channon: This scheme will receive careful consideration when the road programme is reviewed next spring.

Mr. Hicks: Is my right hon. Friend aware that with the opening of the Saltash bypass, which he kindly undertook in September, in theory one can now drive, without changing gear, between Glasgow or London and Saltash along motorway or dual carriageway, but that one then hits a most unsatisfactory first-class cart track of eight or nine miles which bisects two villages? My right hon. Friend cannot agree that that is either satisfactory or sensible.

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend was kind enough to take me along that particular section of road and I was deeply impressed by what he showed me. I shall keep the matter very much in mind. As usual, my hon. Friend is proving a powerful advocate for his constituents.

Channel Tunnel

10. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to the siting of one of the proposed Channel tunnel terminals to the north of central London.

Mr. Portillo: The siting of Channel tunnel rail terminals is a matter for British Rail, which has suggested King's Cross, Stratford or White City as possible sites.

Mr. Gill: I appreciate that the decision must rest with the commercial undertaking—in this case, British Rail. However, will my hon. Friend use his considerable influence to encourage British Rail to look at the possibility of using the cheaper and more extensive sites available to it to the north of central London? Will he also seek to remind British Rail of the folly of bringing into central London one more passenger than necessary, bearing in mind the considerable congestion that already exists in the metropolis, which is bordering on paralysis? Will he further consider that by encouraging British Rail to choose a site away from central London he would considerably assist the spread of prosperity to the regions beyond the south-east, including Scotland and the Principality of Wales?

Mr. Portillo: I am as keen as my hon. Friend to ensure that the advantages and benefits of the Channel tunnel extend to every region. Ideally, the terminal site that is chosen must offer services and easy interchange to the regions. However, my hon. Friend must recognise that many people want to travel from the centre of Paris or Brussels to the heart of London and the terminal must cater for them, too.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that the second largest concentration of population in the country lies in the belt from the Mersey to the Humber, and that to enable people to travel in the best possible way we need a terminal in the north-west, which could serve both those regions and be an advantage not only to them, but to London, by relieving congestion there?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman knows that section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 requires British Rail to come forward with plans by the end of next year for the freight and passenger services that it proposes to put in place in the regions. Discussions are now taking place through working parties in every region and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to make his point of view known to those working parties.

Mr. Hind: Does my hon. Friend consider that building terminals at, for example, Manchester and Liverpool, and using route four, which was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) in his excellent magazine "Tunnel Vision", will take an awful lot of traffic out of the centre of London and straight into the tunnel and thus deal with the problem that my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) has mentioned?

Mr. Portillo: I read "Tunnel Vision" with great interest. I hope that my hon. Friend the author will pursue those proposals with British Rail. It will be for him to convince British Rail that that route makes the best possible sense.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: What role is the Department playing in ensuring that British Rail does not concentrate all its efforts on the golden triangle in the south-east? Is the Department trying to use its influence to persuade British Rail that it should electrify north of the central belt in Scotland to ensure that the Grampian region and the Highlands and Islands are not disadvantaged?

Mr. Portillo: I do not believe that electrification is the crucial issue for freight services. However, we have written into the Channel Tunnel Act the requirement that British Rail should bring forward its proposals for the regions for both freight and passenger traffic. I look forward, as I am sure does the hon. Lady, to those proposals being made by the end of next year.

Road Building

11. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new road schemes will be started in 1989.

Mr. Channon: About 40.

Mr. Devlin: In view of the high premium that roads in the north-east will have in the run-up to 1992, will my right hon. Friend tell me whether included in the number for announcement next year are the Stockton south spine road, the A167 Middleton St. George bypass and the three-lane motorway scheme to replace the A1, which is currently effecting a wall of congestion between the north-east of England and the rest of the country?

Mr. Channon: I had better write to my hon. Friend on some of the more detailed points. I am strongly in favour of improving road links to the north and hope to start the Woolsington bypass in the north-east and to make improvements in north Yorkshire. With the extra amount of money available for road expenditure, I am looking forward to extensive improvements to the A1, especially in Yorkshire, and to a general review of the whole road programme. I shall bear what my hon. Friend has said in mind.

Mr. Haynes: Is the Secretary of State aware that I am a cyclist, that there are a great many of us in the Chamber right now and that we are shocked and appalled by the fact that none of the new roads provided in the past and none of those proposed for the future give proper consideration to cyclists? I want to know what he is going to do about that.

Mr. Channon: In conjunction with my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for roads, I shall consider what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I am sure that we shall be able to do everything that he wants.

Mr. Moate: What is my right hon. Friend doing to speed up the decision-making and planning processes involved in new road schemes? Does he accept that, compared with the speed of industrial and economic change today, and with the practice of our competitors on the continent, our present processes are painfully and unacceptably slow?

Mr. Channon: Practice varies in different parts of the continent and in some places the processes are considerably slower even than those of the British system. Of course, we must have a system to preserve people's democratic rights and the planning procedures. However, I am working on improvements to the internal mechanisms of the Department, which I hope will ensure a significant speeding up of the present procedures.

Mr. Clelland: Does the Secretary of State's programme include the completion of improvements to the A69 between Carlisle and Newcastle? If not, when can we expect the improvements to be completed?

Mr. Channon: There are improvements in the programme, but I do not think that all the possible improvements are included. Again, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman. He will be pleased with the progress on the Newcastle bypass.

13. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the progress of the current road building programme in the north-west.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Seven major motorway and trunk road construction contracts are currently under way with a total value of around £100 million.

Non-trunk road schemes are the responsibility of the region's 18 local highway authorities.

Mr. Thurnham: Bearing in mind the congestion on roads in the north of my constituency, will my hon. Friend examine the need to designate as a trunk road the A666, which links with the M61? What is he doing to improve the dreadfully designed junction of the M61 with the M6?

Mr. Bottomley: I am aware of the junction to which my hon. Friend draws attention. We have had consultants look at it. We are not likely to trunk the A666 in the short term, partly because we are giving transport supplementary grant for some of the improvements to it.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Why is the construction of the M66 in my constituency being delayed? Why has the completion date slipped by almost six months? When does the Minister expect the Denton to Hollinwood section to be completed? It would do a great deal to relieve the horrific congestion on the east side of Manchester.

Mr. Bottomley: Our aim, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, is to ensure that the statutory procedures are completed properly, but without undue delay and to ensure that we can spend the money so that work can be completed. I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's question and give a precise date for when the road will be finished.

Mr. Leigh: Will my hon. Friend consider the many requests being put to him by Humberside councils and Lincolnshire county council for an extension of the M11 to the Humber bridge and then northwards to York? The problems on the A1 are the result of overloading. The whole of the east midlands would benefit from an extension of the M11.

Mr. Bottomley: Taking the needs of the east midlands and the north-east together, it is right to continue with improvements to the A1, which is what I said earlier to the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong). When we have done that, we may well consider what further can be done.

London Regional Transport

14. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what financial objectives he has given to London Regional Transport since 20 July 1984.

Mr. Channon: Targets for external finance have been set annually in the public expenditure surveys. I hope to agree new objectives with the chairman of LRT shortly.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Secretary of State recall that his Department's standing instructions, issued by a former Secretary of State, are to cut support by £95 million a year and to keep fares level? Is he aware that the withdrawal of buses from West Ham garage last week was the result of new schedules which require drivers to work longer hours and cover more miles, putting their health and the safety of passengers at risk? Is not a change of the instructions overdue? How is it that, although the instructions say that fares in London should remain more or less stable, we now have increased fares—increased ahead of the cost of living—and reduced safety standards? Will the right hon. Gentleman change the instructions very soon?

Mr. Channon: I am about, I hope in the not-too-distant future, to publish new objectives for London Regional Transport. The hon. Gentleman's description of the 1984 objectives was a little colourful. The objectives refer to LRT's statutory duties, which include safety, and make it clear that they supplement the board's statutory duties. The board could not override those statutory duties. I shall see that LRT considers the hon. Gentleman's detailed point carefully.

Mr. Squire: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it remains an objective of the Government to maximise the use of public transport in London and that, since 1984, there has been a welcome increase in the use of London transport and in the provision of services, particularly on the Underground?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend is right on both counts. The increase has been matched by an enormous increase in investment in London Underground, which will increase still further.

British Transport Police

15. Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he is giving to the future of the British Transport police under privatisation proposals.

Mr. Portillo: Should BR be privatised at some date in the future, the implications for the British Transport police would have to be considered.

Mr. Dalyell: How? In what detail? When?

Mr. Portillo: The matter does not arise yet, but the hon. Gentleman realises that if there is a change in the ownership of British Rail, the question about the British transport police will arise. We shall consider that if there is to be a change in the ownership of British Rail.

Light Rail Projects

16. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many light rail projects which are privately funded, or partly privately funded, are planned.

Mr. Portillo: There are plans for private sector participation in light rail projects in London's docklands, in Manchester and in Bristol. Other possibilities are in the pipeline.

Mr. Bennett: As most other European countries have had light rail or tramway systems for many years, will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the authorities which are now considering such a system? Will he say which other local authorities are considering private finance?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, I congratulate local authorities which are considering such systems and private sector interests which are also considering them. Several projects are in the pipeline and among those that spring to mind are those in west Yorkshire and the west midlands, where both passenger transport executives have made it clear that they are interested in private finance.

Kingsferry Bridge

18. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his latest figures for peak traffic volumes on the Kingferry bridge, on the A429 to Sheerness.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Average weekday flows for the first nine months of this year were about 1,870 for both morning and evening peak hours.

Mr. Moate: Does my hon. Friend agree that the present traffic flows make it abundantly clear that a full dual carriageway is justified? Bearing in mind that this road is a single carriageway over a lifting bridge that rises thousands of times a year and leads to one of the largest ports of the United Kingdom, will he tell me when we may get our dual carriageway and second crossing?

Mr. Bottomley: No, but as soon as possible. I have been along the road and I think that it is appalling.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Cathedrals (Staff Costs)

74. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what representations the Church Commissioners have received about the staff costs associated with the maintenance of cathedrals.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, Representing Church Commissioners): The commissioners have received one request in the past year for increased help towards the staff costs of a cathedral. It will be considered in the new year in the context of the distribution of the commissioners' income for 1990-91.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that our cathedrals are part of our aesthetic, spiritual and cultural heritage? Does he agree also that it is an absolute scandal that the authorities of Hereford cathedral are having to consider selling one of their great legacies to finance its continued maintenance? Does he further agree that, as the Government are financing the maintenance of historic churches, more public funds should be made available for the maintenance of our cathedrals, which do so much to encourage the tourist trade?

Mr. Alison: It is a little premature to talk of scandal in the context of the sale of the map. That would arise only if the authorities were forced to sell it. At present, consideration is being given to selling it, but the public debate and widespread general interest generated by the proposal may result in the sale not having to take place.

Mr. Frank Field: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that an increasing amount of property is sold on a time share basis? Could not such a principle be applied to Mappa Mundi? In particular, if the time share were limited to a certain period, would that not raise the necessary funds and ensure that Mappa Mundi stayed at the cathedral while the cathedral sorted out its long-term finances?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman has made a helpful and constructive proposal. The cathedral authorities in Hereford tried to negotiate with the Government and other national bodies and istitutions with a view to selling the entire collection of treasures in Hereford cathedral to the nation at a preferential price on condition that it remained in situ. Unfortunately, those negotiations were unsuccessful.

Mr. Cormack: Is my right hon. Friend aware that those remarks have not been substantiated in all quarters and that there seems to be some dispute about precisely what was done and when? Will he, with his commissioner colleagues, take an initiative and call together the various interested parties to ensure that the map remains in situ and the cathedral is helped?

Mr. Alison: I shall certainly consider whether an initiative by the commissioners would be helpful, although a large number of people privately and in public positions are only too anxious to secure the objective that my hon. Friend mentioned. He will be aware that the Church Commissioners already give over £100,000 a year to Hereford cathedral.

Church Renovation (Inner Cities)

75. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what assistance is available to parishes in the inner cities to enable church renovation to be undertaken.

Mr. Alison: In certain cases assistance for inner city parishes may be sought from the diocese, which can seek grants, for instance, from the church urban fund, but those funds are limited. Help may also be available from the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, local authorities, national and local trusts and charities. I have placed a list of grant-making bodies compiled by the Council for the Care of Churches in the Library of the House.

Mr. Alton: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for going to that trouble. Does he agree that it would be in line with the spirit of the "Faith in the Cities" report if more funding could be made available to churches in inner cities such as Liverpool, where churches are having to consider selling local variants of the Mappa Mundi? One church in my constituency is considering selling a prize piece of stained glass to try to pay for a crumbling Victorian edifice. Does he agree that that is an unfortunate position in which to place churches, and that additional assistance is needed?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government can provide help in maintaining the fabric of individual parish churches, but not cathedrals. The church urban fund is generating a huge amount of voluntary giving, although there is always more to be spent than the sums available. The Church Commissioners would have been delighted to give more than the £1 million a year that they give to the church urban fund, were it not for the priority that we have to give to clergy pensions and stipends. I believe that an enormous amount of ground is still to be made and I would encourage the hon. Gentleman and my fellow commissioners to do everything possible to encourage voluntary giving for inner city parishes.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Meeting

78. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what was discussed at the Public Accounts Commission's last meeting.

Sir Peter Hordern (The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The Commission's last formal meeting was held on Tuesday 25 October, when among the subjects considered were the National Audit Office's appropriation account for 1987-88, and its Vote on account for 1989-90, and the salaries of the C and AG and the C and A-G for Northern Ireland. In addition, four members of the Commission paid an informal visit to the Northern Ireland Audit Office on 1 November.

Mr. Allen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his reply. Will he elaborate a little more on the status of the C and A-G for Northern Ireland? Obviously, the Public Accounts Commission and a number of hon. Members are extremely concerned about the status and salary of the C and A-G for Northern Ireland. Did the Commission have any further thoughts on that?

Sir Peter Hordern: The Commission has considered these matters on many occasions, particularly in our report issued in July. However, we have made no further progress in increasing the Northern Ireland Comptroller and Auditor-General's salary. Indeed, his position is somewhat worse than originally intended as he is not due to receive the merit awards that are available to other permanent heads of other Departments in Northern Ireland. It is a very regrettable affair.

Mr. Cohen: At its next meeting, will the Public Accounts Commission give some consideration to what should happen to Ministers of the Crown who cost the taxpayers millions of pounds in public money in neglect, for example, over the sale of the Royal Ordnance factories, when the Ministers who were to blame have subsequently moved on? Should they not be brought to account——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can answer questions for which he has no responsibility.

Sir Peter Hordern: It is a very interesting question but, alas, it is not for me.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

National and Historic Treasures

76. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, if the Church Commissioners have any plans to seek responsibilities in respect of treasures of national and historic significance held in cathedrals in England.

Mr. Alison: No, Sir. This is a matter for the cathedrals. However, the General Synod has recently given general approval to a draft Care of Cathedrals Measure which makes certain provisions in this area.

Mr. Shepherd: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the citizens of Hereford and the people of the Hereford diocese are absolutely devastated at the prospects facing the Mappa Mundi and Hereford cathedral? Is he aware that although the Care of Cathedrals Measure does in some way set out a mechanism for exercising a veto on moves such as are contemplated by the dean and chapter of Hereford, it in no way constitutes a constructive proposal for solving such problems? Does he not feel that the Church Commissioners have a positive input to make at least in establishing the mechanisms by which deans and chapters of cathedrals under threat may realise as much as possible of their assets without selling them—that is, by getting into marketing?

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend knows that the Church Commissioners have no direct responsibility for the maintenance of cathedrals other than through the considerable grants given for the stipends of certain cathedral staff. My hon. Friend also knows that the controversy and publicity over the Mappa Mundi, which the Archbishop of Canterbury has said would be a severe loss to the nation and the cathedral, will generate considerable charitable thought or support. For example, there may be support through the City livery companies, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, possibly through the Royal Commision on Historical Manuscripts, the National Heritage Memorial Fund and other similar bodies. It is in that direction that the constructive moves that my hon. Friend has bespoken will materialise.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the right hon. Gentleman point out to the General Synod that if it alters the Care of Cathedrals Measure in January and passes an appropriate Measure, it could come to the House and be approved before the prospective sale of the Mappa Mundi by Sothebys in June? The General Synod and Parliament could act in time if the will was there and the Church Commissioners gave their backing.

Mr. Alison: What the hon. Gentleman said is true. However, he must not underestimate the controversy that might arise in the House if we were to start debating the fabric of cathedrals.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Bernard Ingham

79. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what facilities he is making available for Mr. Bernard Ingham in the Palace of Westminster.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I have nothing further to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member on Monday 27 June, at column 18.

Mr. Dalyell: On Friday, in discussions on the new building, will the Lord President of the Council be announcing a suite of rooms fitting to such a great personage as Mr. Ingham? Will there be provision for a sub-station for him at Buckingham palace, and can the right hon. Gentleman tell us, once and for all, whether, when Mr. Ingham was instructing the Lobby on the question of the Queen and Russia, he was semi-detached?

Mr. Wakeham: On the first part of the question, the hon. Gentleman would be in trouble with his hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who wants more facilities in the House for Opposition Members, because his rather fanciful suggestions would make matters worse. I have no plans of the type mentioned.

On the other issue, the matter does not arise and is completely hypothetical. Consequently, it has not been addressed by the Government.

Members' Facilities

80. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects the completion of the inquiry by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee into proposals to improve hon. Members' facilities in the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Wakeham: It is not possible to predict at this stage when the inquiry will be completed. Preliminary discussions are taking place between the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee and the new Building Sub-Committee with a view to deciding how best to proceed. I am sure my hon. Friend will appreciate that for the Sub-Committees to consider thoroughly the wide range of possible improvements to right hon. and hon. Members' facilities, the inquiry will necessarily take a little time.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend take steps to improve the security of the facilities in the building? Is he aware that the CID is examining handwriting to discover the identity of a thief who stole a private letter from my secretary's desk and posted it to the former Member for Bury and Radcliffe? Some Opposition Members have asked that we stop calling each other hon. Members. Will my right hon. Friend condemn the action of a former hon. Member in posting copies of such a letter to the press, and will he ask the Lord Chancellor to review the position of a justice of the peace who stoops to such disgraceful behaviour?

Mr. Wakeham: I know something of the case to which my hon. Friend refers, but it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any particular case, however distressing? I am sure that the arrangements to protect hon. Members' personal possessions and papers are, by and large, adequate. However, there is a point beyond which those arrangements cannot and should not operate. In the final analysis, hon. Members must bear responsibility for their possessions and are so advised in the official literature issued to them and their secretaries. I know that that goes wider than my hon. Friend's distressing case, but it is right that I should say it.

Mr. Allen: Before the Lord President of the Council comments on the report of the Sub-Committees, will he compare our facilities with those of Representatives and Congressmen in America, where there are up to 15 members of staff for each Congressman and three offices in each constituency, each with two full-time people? Although we would not require so many facilities, would not such assistance be a major improvement and help hon. Members to do their jobs?

Mr. Wakeham: I share the hon. Gentleman's view that we do not want those sorts of facilities, but I am sure that the Sub-Committees will do their best to provide better facilities where existing ones are not adequate.

Press Briefings (Televising)

82. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make facilities available in the House for the televising of press briefings given by Ministers or their press officers.

Mr. Wakeham: No, Sir.

Mr. Winnick: When a briefing is given to the Lobby, especially by someone of the importance of Mr. Ingham —who, as the Leader of the House knows, is in effect the deputy Prime Minister—should not the general public be allowed to see him in action giving his views on all sorts of national and international questions?

Mr. Wakeham: The parliamentary Lobby journalists have a room allocated to them in the North Turret above the Upper Committee Corridor. I understand that it is for their own convenience that they invite Ministers, Government information officers and others to brief them. The hon. Gentleman may well have been there. Arrangements for briefing the press outside the House are organised separately by Government Departments. I do not believe that there is any need to change the arrangements.

Mr. Holt: Will my right hon. Friend give an undertaking that under no circumstance will he provide television facilities for briefings by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick)?

Mr. Wakeham: That is a slightly more difficult question. The Select Committee that I chair is charged with providing an experimental scheme for televising the proceedings of the House. If the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) takes part in those proceedings, he will be as likely as any other hon. Member to be seen on television.

Private Members' Bills

83. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any plans to seek to implement the recommendations of the Bow Group that additional time be provided in some circumstances to enable completion of consideration of private Members' Bills.

Mr. Wakeham: Any changes in the present arrangements for the consideration of private Members' business would be a matter for decision by the House.

Mr. Alton: Given the imminence of a debate on procedure and also the next private Members' ballot, is it not time that the right hon. Gentleman brought forward proposals, perhaps based on some of the recommendations of the Bow Group, to cover such matters as injury time, when time has been lost for various reasons, or for razor motions, to allow the House to decide whether additional time should be given so that important private Members' Bills can complete their stages, if that be the wish of the House?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the beat-the-clock tactics that are so often used against controversial private Members' Bills bring the House into disrepute?

Mr. Wakeham: The question of time for private Members' Bills is something which the House might, at some stage, wish to reconsider. I am open minded on the matter and should prefer to hear the views of the House. That is one reason why I arranged for a procedure debate to take place later this week. I do not believe that the appropriate way to proceed is necessarily on the basis of a recommendation from even such a distinguished body as the Bow Group. However, if it is the will of the House to change the procedure, we can think about that at a later stage.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is profoundly unsatisfactory that the House can spend many hours and days debating a topic such as abortion, but, due to the delaying tactics of a minority, no final decision can be taken, despite very strong public opinion that a change in the law is overdue?

Mr. Wakeham: I certainly deplore delaying tactics. Debates should be conducted in proper accordance with our traditions and order. For a long time private Members' legislation has been subject to an overall time constraint, although this Government have allowed more time for such legislation than was the previous practice.

Members' Facilities

84. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what consideration is being given to making further facilities available in the House for Members of the Opposition.

Mr. Wakeham: As I confirmed earlier in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), the relevant Sub-Committees of the Services Committee are already charged with an examination of what further facilities should be provided for all Members, including those of the Opposition. The debate on the Services Committee report on the new parliamentary building (phase 2) this Friday should provide an excellent opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to raise any specific points he wishes to make.

Mr. Banks: When I tabled the question, I had in mind the inequality of treatment between the Government and the Opposition in the Chamber, for example on Report and in Committee on the Floor of the House. Ministers can refer to civil servants in their Box, and notes can be passed backwards and forwards. Opposition Members have difficulties if they wish to consult our advisers sitting under the Public Gallery. For example, our advisers are not allowed to bring in notes or to write notes for us. There seems to be inequality of treatment. I should like the Lord President to examine the matter and make sure that he acts upon it.

Mr. Wakeham: I shall certainly examine the matter, but I do not believe that the long-held customs and practices of the House need revising. I certainly take note of what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Dykes: The sad reality is that, even if we improve facilities for Opposition Members, we will not improve their arguments and the cases that they deploy. Bearing in mind that we are members of an increasingly successful European Community, would it be more worthwhile to introduce access to our modest facilities for the first time for European Members?

Mr. Wakeham: I am of a more charitable frame of mind than my hon. Friend. Access to information will improve everybody's minds, including those of some Opposition Members.

On the question of access for European Members, as my hon. Friend will know, I have tried to get agreement to make some modest changes in the arrangements. It is right that we should proceed by agreement. At the moment I do not have that agreement, but I shall continue to try to get it.

Fax Machines

85. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will set up in the Palace of Westminster and its outbuildings a network of fax machines for use by hon. Members.

Mr. Wakeham: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Cohen: Fax machines are high-tech extensions of photocopiers and telephones, both of which are available for hon. Members. Should not the machine's general availability be one of the fax of life in this Parliament?

Mr. Wakeham: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the matter was considered by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee not long ago. The conclusion was that it should be the responsibility of individual Members to provide their own machines, if that is what they want to do. There is a much-enhanced allowance—I shall say no more than that—for office expenses, which makes it possible to do so nowadays.

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That the matter of the effects of the Queen's Speech on the people of Wales, being a matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Iron Casting (Scientific Research Levy) (Abolition) Order 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Employment Subsidies Act 1978 (Renewal) (Great Britain) Order 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Sri Chinmoy

3.32 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you will be aware, great harm is being done in this country by religious cults, but are you aware that, judging by the invitation that I have here, a cult is planning to hold a meeting in one of our Committee Rooms tomorrow? The cult is Sri Chinmoy, whose leader caused you, Mr. Speaker, personal embarrassment earlier this year. He has been taken to task by the United Nations for claiming official links with that organisation. If the meeting goes ahead, there will be claims that we support the cult, and more young people will be tricked into signing up for total obedience to a cult, the leader of which claims to be able to lift elephants and paint 16,000 pictures a day. Do you have power to stop the meeting?

Mr. Speaker: I imagine that the normal rules in the matter have been followed. The Room has been booked by an hon. Member, and I have no reason to believe that anything out of order has taken place.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[Fifth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [22 November]

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Sir Giles Shaw.]*

Question again proposed.

Environment and Industry

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

In view of the pressure to speak in this debate today, I will impose between 7 and 9 o'clock the 10-minute limit on speeches. I say to those hon. Members who are called before that time to bear in mind that their speeches should not greatly exceed the limit of 10 minutes so that as many hon. Members as possible may be called.

3.34 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I beg to move, at the end of the Question, to add:

"But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech contains proposals to create private monopolies by the sale of the nation's water and electricity industries to foreign and British commercial organisations, thus damaging the interests of consumers, taxpayers, and the environment; regret the absence of a Bill to safeguard comprehensively the nation's environment and heritage, and further regret the inclusion of proposals to discriminate against council house tenants whilst ignoring the problems caused by record levels of mortgage rates and homelessness in urban and rural areas alike."

In 1986 the Labour party adopted a radical and comprehensive policy document setting out its policies on the environment. That statement, although requiring updating in part, remains the most coherent statement of environment policy by any party in the House. It is a policy based on realism and experience, and sets out a bold strategy for Britain under a Labour Government. It is firmly based on our aims and values for a safer and cleaner environment nationally and internationally.

We welcome the challenge to political parties thrown down recently by the Worldwide Fund for Nature and other environmental groups, because the overwhelming majority of the issues that they cover are already part of our policy. I am confident that the rest will be covered by the existing policy review. We note that the Prime Minister has belatedly, after almost a decade in office, moved the environment to the top of her agenda. It has been at the top of ours for a considerable time. I suspect that, like us, the Prime Minister is aware that 81 per cent. of the British people believe that the Government should be doing more to protect the environment.

The Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for the Environment and I are all scientists. It is said that the beginning of wisdom is to look facts in the face and to call them by their right names. Therefore, there should be some opportunity for agreement. Has there really been a conversion on the road to the Royal Society? Has the Secretary of State suddenly and uncharacteristically been transformed from the 19th century market forces guru that he has so often boasted of being, when deregulating buses, for example, or when trying to end the interference of councils in the housing market, into something different? Has he suddenly become the interventionist people's Nick? I doubt it.

The problem for the Government is that their ideology is completely out of phase with the demands of ecology —the science of people and the environmnent. In order to be complementary to sound environmental practice, successful policies demand intervention on a consistent and wide-ranging front and in every facet of policy. They also demand planning and interference in the market in a way that can only be anathema to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State.

We especially welcome the Prime Minister's speech at the Royal Society because it has focused attention on this need. In doing so it has moved the debate on to our political ground.

We believe, and history shows, that left to themselves market forces are environmentally damaging and destructive. The Government and the Secretary of State are in head-on collision with their own most cherished dogma that the market will provide a solution. However, our countryside, our heritage, the poor people of the world, the oceans and the atmosphere cannot take that gamble any longer—the risks are too great and the damage already too serious not to call a halt. I know that the Secretary of State, as a scientist, would agree that the market is not scientific.

It is also important to compare the recent rhetoric of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State with their records. Many hon. Members would agree that the pressures on land, housing, social facilities and on the infrastructure in London and in the south of England have become intolerable. Many Conservative Back Benchers are deeply uneasy about the consequences of their Government's policies, and we share that unease. The grotesquely distorted developments of the north-south divide in Britain are a direct consequence of Government policies since 1979.

The devastation of industry and employment in Scotland, the north and the midlands has produced the equal and opposite reaction in the south. In reality, many Tories are now getting what they voted for, but they are discovering that it is not what they really want. In Berkshire, Dorset, Essex, Hampshire and elsewhere protests mount as development rolls over towns and villages. It is impossible, however, not to feel a little sorry for the current Secretary of State—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Oh yes. He shares my view that all this is not really his fault and that it all began back in 1980 when the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) opened the floodgates to developments in the south—Berkshire and elsewhere.

At that time the Conservative Government issued strategic planning guidance to

"sweep away obstacles to commercial enterprise"

in the south. That guidance reduced proposals from Tory Berkshire and Surrey county councils in particular to extend the green belt to protect their communities. Of course many people in the Tory party and many business people have taken their lead from that early guidance issued by the Tory Government.

Mr. Michael Heseltine (Henley) *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: I shall give way in a moment.

In Dorset, the Tory county council is now proposing a new town in its own green belt land in the parish of St. Leonards and St. Ives. Several Tory councillors are also landowners and developers in the area and the former planning officer of the east Dorset district council has gone into busines to advise developers seeking planning permission in the local authority area. Bewildered and disillusioned local people are entitled to ask what is going on because it is not what they voted for. I know that some Tory Members share their concern.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch) The hon. Gentleman has referred to an area in my constituency, and I regret that what he has said is true. There is widespread concern about what has been done and proposed by the Dorset county council. Does the hon. Gentleman share my hope that the Secretary of State will do to the county council's ideas what he has already done to a similar proposal by the Carroll Group—throw them out lock, stock and barrel?

Dr. Cunningham: Of course I share that view. I further hope, however, that the Secretary of State will, at long last, recognise that such unbalanced development in Britain is as bad for the people of the south as it is damaging for the people of the midlands, the north and Scotland. That is the failure at the heart of the Government's policies.

Mr. Heseltine: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that what we did in 1979-80 was, if anything, to reduce the consequences of the planning assumptions that the last Labour Government put before the county councils? Can he give one example of a county in which we increased the number of houses over and above the assumptions of the outgoing Labour Government?

Dr. Cunningham: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that, when he was Secretary of State, he granted on appeal for almost 1 million sq. ft. of extra office space in Berkshire. Such commercial development inevitably brought in its train huge increases in demand for housing in the Thames valley and elsewhere. That is what the right hon. Gentleman did when he was Secretary of State, and the present Secretary of State wrote on 18 March to remind him of it. Whatever he might say about the previous Labour Government, the growth in pressure for development in Greater London and in counties surrounding London is a direct result of the Government's policies since 1979.

Mr. Heseltine: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: No, I shall not give way. The Secretary of State agrees with that and wrote and told the right hon. Gentleman so, and he knows it.

The highly respected photographer, Mr. Norman Parkinson, recently expressed his fears about those policies in the Thames valley when he talked of it becoming "another synthetic community". How right he was. The dilemma was perhaps posed more graphically by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) in an article entitled,

"Southern California—a suburb coming near you soon".

[Dr. Cunningham]

The Secretary of State, as a scientist, recently wrote of the need to put "evidence before emotion" in the discussion of these issues. I am pleased to see that he recognises the need for that. I wish that he would put evidence before the House a little more often and practise what he preaches. Why does he not put before the House the evidence of his expenditure on housing action trusts which he has refused to do in answer to questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon)? Why does he not put before the House the evidence that he is commissioning on the value of the assets of Britain's water industries before he sells them? If he believes in putting evidence before emotion, why cannot everyone, including taxpayers, know of that evidence before decisions are taken?

Unfortunately for the Secretary of State, although he does not practise what he preaches, many environmentalists and scientists have taken him at his word. For example, Mr. Hugh Fish, retiring chairman of the Natural Environment Research Council, said recently that, if the squeeze on funding is not halted, environmental research could suffer damage from which it would take years to recover. His successor, Professor John Knill, warned that

"the council could no longer support some important environmental monitoring programmes."

This year, the council is losing perhaps up to 160 jobs as a direct result of Government policy. The Department of the Environment's expenditure on environmental research has fallen in real terms from £40·6 million in 1979-80 to £28·8 million now, according to a written answer from the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment on 24 October this year.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has also announced wide-ranging cuts in research. At a time when eggs in Britain now come with a Government health warning because salmonella bacteria are endemic in chickens and eggs in this country, the research programme of the Food Research Institute at Bristol into microbial intestinal flora has been axed as a result of the Government's policies. Recently, on Radio 4's "Food Programme", Dr. Geoff Mead of that institute said:

"Unfortunately our work has recently fallen victim of the Government's cuts in food and agriculture. So the work will now cease. . . . The industry needs all the help it can get in applying whatever control measures are available."

Work in other important areas of public concern affecting pesticides, animal disease and pollution has also been cut. The secretary of the Agricultural and Food Research Council, Professor Stewart, has condemned the cuts, which he said

"would have a drastic effect on the biological science base of the UK."

As recently as last Wednesday, the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council, the inoffensive but effective Mr. William Wilkinson, said that the Government had cut the council's grant for next year by 5 per cent. He added:

"The question of money is probably the matter that gives me the greatest anxiety as to whether or not we can carry out what is required for the future."

Since 1979, scientific research has been continually squeezed deliberately by the Government, with cuts affecting both research councils and universities. The cuts have been especially damaging to environmental monitoring programmes, including those directed to the atmosphere. Some, including the measurement of long-lived radionuclides in estuarine sediments, have been axed altogether. The Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent announcement of increased funding for science falls well short of the minimum sum recommended by the Government's own advisory board for the research councils. The Government's policy of stopping the funding of what they call near market research can lead only to further cuts in long-term scientific work. The evidence from the Government's budget is that Ministers continue to downgrade long-term environmental monitoring and research when they allocate resources.

Examination of the Government's performance in other environmental matters exposes the Tories' record on the environment, which is abysmal. Britain has the dirtiest beaches in Europe, with the Commission taking legal action against the Government in five of the worst cases. Nearly 11 million people are forced to drink water of a quality below that required by Community standards, including those in many areas of the country where there are excessive nitrate levels in water. Again, the Community is taking Britain to court in respect of six serious breaches. There is a total absence of any strategy for managing the rising quantities of toxic and hazardous chemical wastes. This was graphically illustrated by the recent Karin B fiasco. Furthermore, there is a complete absence of any strategy for managing nuclear wastes. The Radioactive Wastes Management Advisory Committee reported in July,

"policy remains disappointingly confused or deficient."

The Government's dilatory attitude towards tackling the problems of acid rain is well documented. Britain remains the largest emitter of sulphur dioxide in western Europe, with an increase of 200,000 tonnes last year. Between them the three power stations in the entrance to the Aire valley in Yorkshire—Ferrybridge, Eggborough, and Drax B—burn 20 million tonnes of coal a year, producing one fifth of the nation's electricity. They will be sending into the air annually about 800,000 tonnes of gases that can be converted into acid rain—600,000 tonnes of sulphur dioxide and 200,000 tonnes of nitrogen oxides. That is more than one sixth of the entire national outputs of Portugal, Norway, Switzerland and Ireland put together.

The Government have encouraged the import of hazardous and domestic wastes for purely financial gain while they have refused to consider the major implications for national land use and planning, the environment and public health. In addition, the Department of the Environment has just five inspectors to supervise more than 5,600 tips in England and Wales. That is simply not credible. Even responsible companies in the waste treatment industry are highly critical of the Government's policies.

The Government have also refused to meet their obligations under the convention on the international trade in endangered species. Again, the European Community has initiated legal proceedings. The Government still have a confused and lamentable response to the environmental consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. They also made a churlish, miserly and dishonest response to last year's unprecedented storm damage. The Tory-dominated Select Committee on Agriculture condemned that response in March. As a consequence of the Government's response, much of the woodland areas of southern England appear set to remain devastated for decades as a result of the Government's policy.

Britain remains the worst offender in dumping materials in the North sea, with untreated sewage sludge and waste materials predominating.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: In a moment.

Earlier this year, following an incident at the Lowermoor water treatment works, more than 20,000 people in the Camelford area were poisoned by their own domestic water supply. Of course, the regional water authority, thanks to the Government, now meets in secret and the press and public are excluded. There has been an internal inquiry into the biggest scandal involving the poisoning of people in this country in living memory. If the Secretary of State had any sense of duty and responsibility, he would set up a public inquiry into the matter now. However, he has consistently refused to do so.

Mr. Leigh: Is the hon. Gentleman satisfied with the level of investment by the water industry in sewage treatment over the past 20 years under Labour and Conservative Governments? If not, how would he re-order the priorities of a Labour Government to refresh those parts of the water authority which no Government has ever tackled?

Dr. Cunningham: Of course I am not satisfied. The hon. Gentleman must be aware that no Opposition Members are content with the status quo. However, we do not have to sell the nation's water assets to increase investment and improve pollution control; and we do not have to dun the consumers of water in the process either.

Nations bordering the North sea, our Community partners, the Nordic Council countries, Environment Select Committees of both Houses of Parliament and most recently the Royal Commission on environmental pollution are all strongly and persistently critical of the Government's policy failures. It is little wonder that the Government have been arraigned by the European Commission on more charges than all the other Community countries combined.

The Secretary of State argued last week that the nouveau riche were the best guardians of our heritage. Unfortunately for the Secretary of State, he was pre-empted by the nouveau riche Mr. Frank Bayada, who outbid conservationists to buy 34 acres of the New Forest in anticipation of the Secretary of State's thoughts. However, he ruined the policy promptly by taking a bulldozer to more than 500 ancient trees, felling the lot. In hours a 900-year-old habitat was wrecked, as was the Secretary of State's policy. *The Sunday Telegraph* says that our heritage is under the hammer. It is right: metaphorically and actually our heritage is being sold, and too often destroyed. People are dismayed at the proposed disposal of the Mappa Mundi and other church treasures. The British Coal sale of Thoresby hall in Nottinghamshire, against the views of English Heritage, is a disgrace, and I ask the Secretary of State to inquire into it.

Although the Government can find time in their programme for yet another Local Government Bill—there have been about 50 in 10 years—they can find no room for a Bill to safeguard more effectively our environment and heritage. That is a deplorable omission. If the Government had been considering those issues seriously they would have approached the Opposition months ago to seek out common ground, but they have not done so, and their recent flurry of speeches—caused, no doubt, by alarm at public opinion—is exposed as bogus.

The Government have given no serious long-term thought to these crucial issues. I emphasise that we, for our part, are willing to begin now to explore the opportunities to achieve some consensus on them. But there can be no compromise on Bills on housing, or on the selling off of the nation's electricity and water industries.

The next Local Government Bill will demonstrate the triumph of dogma over reason in Tory policy. The Government's new financial regime for local authority housing could mean the end of central Government's housing subsidy to local authorities, and will also prevent housing departments from subsidising their housing costs from the general rate fund. Rents will rise, and tenants who can afford to pay the full rent will be asked to subsidise their neighbours who are in receipt of housing benefit. The cost of housing benefit will be transferred from general taxation to the rates, while surpluses on council rent funds will be transferred to the general rate fund. Thus council tenants will be taxed twice, first, to support housing benefit and, secondly, to subsidise the poll tax.

The Government are guilty of inefficiency and incompetence on housing finance. One in 10 homeless families are in their present dificulties because of mortgage failures and repossessions. That is the fastest-growing cause of homelessness in the country. House price inflation has put housing out of the reach of many young people who cannot afford a home in the communities in which they were born and have grown up, particularly in the south.

Central Government housing subsidy has been reduced by no less than 80 per cent. since 1979. That has resulted in a shortage of affordable rented housing. Public sector housing starts have fallen from 73,000 in 1979-80 to 15,000 at the latest estimate. That has placed local authorities in an impossible position, and they are spending millions of pounds of ratepayers' money on bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Council waiting lists in some parts of the country have simply stopped operating sensibly. The number of people on waiting lists in England has almost doubled in the past five years, from 750,000 in 1983 to 1·29 million in 1987. Transfers are rare, and growing families are often cramped in flats or other accommodation unsuitable for their needs.

The system of mortgage interest tax relief favours owner-occupiers over tenants and helps wealthier owner-occupiers most of all. In 1979-80 it was worth £1,450 million, and local authority housing subsidies amounted to not quite twice that amount. By 1985-86 mortgage tax relief had risen to £4·75 billion, but local authority housing subsidy had almost stabilised. So much for Government targeting. Twenty-five per cent. of mortgage interest tax relief goes to those earning over £20,000 a year. Housing benefit cuts penalise poorer tenants, especially young people and pensioners. What kind of targeting is that? We need to reform housing finance, to make it fairer both within and between the rented and purchase sectors of the housing market and to ensure an adequate supply of affordable rented housing.

[Dr. Cunningham]

Under the present Government, mortgage rates have been higher for longer than under any previous Government. It is all going wrong for the Chancellor. His top-rate tax-cutting strategy has resulted in only the most wealthy being guaranteed any improvement in living standards. For millions of families the spring tax cuts have been cancelled out by the price rises and mortgage clawbacks of the autumn, and social security cuts make many worse off than ever. Low and middle-income families unable to afford private sector provision are seeing their quality of life suffering from underfunding of the public services. Cuts in real spending and investment in many services have been confirmed in the Autumn Statement, ensuring continued neglect well into the 1990s, and increasingly the British people regard that as unacceptable.

How is this for a quotation:

> "The Government's 'panic hike' in minimum lending rate demonstrates the continuing collapse of its economic policies."?

That was said about a Government who put interest rates up to their present levels. But it was said by the present Foreign Secretary in October 1976 after two years of Labour Government, in the middle of the worst world oil price hikes ever experienced. We have now reached those levels after 10 years of the present Government, and we are the only country in the western world that is self-sufficient in energy supplies. What have the Government to say about that now?

We also have serious misgivings about proposals to change the basis of funding under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972. A change to per capita funding will in many cases have a profoundly adverse effect on councils' discretionary spending and on local schemes, whether in partnership with the private sector or with the highly valued voluntary organisations.

We are implacably opposed to proposals to sell off our nation's electricity and water assets, and to the possibility of control of such fundamental and strategic resources passing abroad. It is difficult to believe that any national Government would elevate the pig-headed pursuit of dogma to such levels.

In electricity supply we shall see the end of coherent, strategic planning of the industry. We face a nuclear power imposte on consumers. Private enterprise gets the assets; consumers get the bill to deal with decommissioning and nuclear waste—if the Government ever have a policy to deal with it, that is. Confusion reigns as the Secretary of State for Energy contradicts the Secretary of State for the Environment, and vice versa. Confusion reigns as the Government refuse to let the market decide, and insist on the building of nuclear power stations regardless of the economics and of the cost to the consumer.

Was it evidence or was it emotion that caused the Secretary of State's outburst about the need for a massive expansion in nuclear power to counteract the greenhouse effect? It certainly was not historical fact that guided him. He quoted the French. The French embarked on nuclear power expansion in the 1970s, but not to protect the environment. The French Minister of the time said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and me when we queried public reaction to their policy, "When you are draining the swamp you do not consult the frogs." It was hardly environmental concerns that drove the French; it was because they recognised that they had no oil or gas and very little coal of their own.

It was not the fact of his own Government's track record on nuclear power that could have guided the Secretary of State. For all their boasting, the Government have begun but have not yet completed one nuclear power station in a decade. It was no analytical, scientific assessment, either. The presence of pollution in the world's atmosphere traps too much heat near the earth instead of allowing it to escape into space. According to the United Nations environment programme, only 50 per cent. of the 3 deg warming effect that is expected early in the next century will be caused by carbon dioxide, and only one third of the 50 per cent. is caused by fossil-fuelled power stations. That is an essential scientific fact that the Secretary of State does not seem to have grasped.

Let us suppose that the nuclear solution is imposed and that we replace two thirds of our fossil-fuelled power stations with nuclear power. The result will be a less than 12 per cent. reduction in the United Kingdom's total contribution to global warming, achieved by building about 30 nuclear reactors. If the Secretary of State had talked about a massive expansion of public transport, he would have been widely applauded because 25 per cent. of the carbon dioxide comes from vehicle emissions, and that figure is expected to increase by 50 per cent. before the end of the century.

The answer that the Secretary of State is grappling for is not a massive expansion of nuclear power, for which there is no place, but a major programme of energy conservation and intervention to reduce demand and to increase the energy efficiency of our homes, industries and public buildings. However, this Government have frittered away the major programme of energy conservation policies that they inherited precisely because they were interventionist.

The BBC says that the Secretary of State's "On The Record" interview was arranged to take place in his home to prevent a walk-out when he was confronted with the evidence of his own confusion. When confronted earlier by ITV over his inconsistency, emotion overcame evidence. The Secretary of State walked out of the studio in the middle of the interview. To obscure his confusion even further, the Secretary of State now attempts to present water privatisation as an environmental measure.

It is completely unnecessary to sell the nation's water assets to achieve the environmental improvements that the Government say are their objective. The proposals ensure that private enterprise will obtain huge and important environmentally sensitive assets while the taxpayer and water consumers are expected to foot the bill for cleaning up the appalling pollution that already exists.

The Secretary of State for the Environment has made no attempt to quantify the value of the assets to be sold, as recommended by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee in its recent report, following the Royal Ordnance fiasco. A huge rip off of the taxpayer is being planned by the Secretary of State. Consumers will have no choice. The proposals contain no iota of competition. They will result in powerful private monopolies deciding their policies for our water supply in secret.

It was this Government who acted to exclude the press, the public and local authority representatives from the meetings of regional water authorities. They have a lot to answer for.

The Secretary of State says that water supply and sewage disposal will be subject to the disciplines of the private sector, but such disciplines as the private sector affords result from the market. There will be no market. Furthermore, there will be no competition and no choice over water supply or sewage disposal. How, therefore, can any disciplines apply? "Ah, yes," said the Secretary of State at his press conference last week, "I know that. Let them use Perrier." Thus spoke Nicholas Antoinette. Picture the scene. "It's time for granny's bath," mother says. "Come now, children. We can't afford a jacuzzi, but pass up the Perrier." It is a joke. It is preposterous. Water consumers will have no choice and no option. They will be at the mercy of massive private enterprise monopolies.

As with the electricity proposals, water privatisation will cost the consumer a great deal. This Government's inflationary dogma will be a burden on the whole economy.

In a speech to the Bow Group on 11 October 1988 the Secretary of State said that this Government were

> "Taking the lead in getting the other Governments of the world to accept their responsibilities."

Will he confirm that at a meeting of Environmental Ministers in Brussels this weekend the British Government blocked a proposal to introduce a new European Community directive to protect threatened flora, fauna and habitats? Is that encouraging other Governments to accept their responsibilities for the environment?

In the same speech on 11 October, the Secretary of State said:

> "The Government does have first-class scientific advisers"—

perhaps that should be, "did have first-class scientific advisers"—

> "and we must enable everyone to share the information they give us. We spend a lot of taxpayers' money on research and advice and indeed we have the best advice. The taxpayer has every right to know the results."

We look forward, therefore, to a green Bill encompassing the freedom of information proposals that are essential if those commitments are to be guaranteed.

We know that under this Prime Minister there is no such thing as society. If she and her Secretary of State remain in power for much longer, there will be little, if any, science, either. It is not just a question of their lack of commitment, their failure to face the evidence and put it before the emotion of their ideology. It is their failure to maintain, let alone improve upon, an already inadequate and fragmented framework of environmental legislation, protection and enforcement.

We are now asked to believe that this Government—red in market forces tooth and claw—have become ideologically colour blind and have taken on a green mantle. We do not need carbon dating to prove that it is a fake. Environmentalists do not believe them. Industry does not believe them. The Secretary of State's pollution inspectors do not believe them, either—that is why they have resigned. And we do not believe them.

4.18 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): The Opposition amendment does not cover some of the main points that the hon. Gentleman has just made about planning policy and research. I shall deal quickly with the research figures and then move to the amendment itself.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) may be interested to know that, contrary to the figures that he gave, the total of Government-funded research will increase from £825 million this year by a further £93 million next year. I do not know how on earth he can describe that as a cut. He may also like to know that within the increased budget for environmental research that is received by the Natural Environment Research Council the council may change its priorities within the increased total—which is what it has done. The hon. Gentleman seemed to ignore totally a Bill that is probably the biggest contribution to cleaning up the environment ever to be put before the House. I am referring to the Water Bill, which has been published.

The privatisation of water and electricity will achieve two vital objectives. First, it will open those industries to the private capital markets for the huge investments that will be needed in future in both industries—mainly to clear up the backlog of pollution, which resulted from the Labour Government's stewardship. Secondly, it will give the managements of those industries the incentive to increase efficiency, to innovate and to diversify for the benefit of their customers and the economy generally.

Much has been said recently about the three big French water companies that are buying some of our statutory water companies. Those three French water companies have been privately owned for a long time and they supply water in France and in many other countries with great efficiency as a result of being in the private sector. I want our English and Welsh water authorities and companies to be equally enterprising, efficient and profitable. I know that the Labour party does not want that. I look forward to the day when they operate efficiently and profitably, not only on their present territory, but perhaps in France, Europe and further afield still.

The hon. Member for Copeland scarcely mentioned the Water Bill. However, I happened to hear the interview that he gave on Radio Cumbria on Thursday night. No doubt he thought that as he was well away from Westminster and had left the House early on a Thursday evening he would be out of earshot. But I heard the broadcast. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ridley: For the sake of greater accuracy, to use your phrase, Mr. Speaker, I obtained a transcript. I shall quote four sections of it to prove how extravagantly inaccurate the hon. Gentleman is. He said:

> "There are huge gaps in the Bill which ensure that existing pollution will continue and that people who are the polluters will be able to drive a coach and horses through the provisions. So there are no real improvements and safeguards for the environment in this Bill."

The truth is that the change in the structure of the water industry that will accompany privatisation will bring out the inherent weakness in the current arrangements, under which the poacher and the gamekeeper have been and are the same person, in the terms used by the Select Committee on the Environment. The water authorities, which are some of the greatest dischargers of polluting substances into rivers, have had also to fulfil the role of controlling pollution of those rivers. We shall change that unsatisfactory situation so that, for the first time, there will

[Mr. Ridley]

be a major national body with a single dedicated remit to tackle water pollution. It will have comprehensive powers to regulate all discharges into rivers, estuaries and the sea and to take action to forestall or remedy pollution.

I shall now quote from an article in the *Financial Times* of last Friday to show how wrong the hon. Member for Copeland was. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the House will listen.—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ridley: The article said of the water authorities:

> "they will be bound hand and foot by regulations specifying standards of quality and service, some from the European Community and others from ministerial directives. They will be subject to a pricing regime which will limit their return on investment, and allow the new Director of Water Regulation to examine in detail the prudence and efficiency of their capital expenditure. They will also be under the supervision of a separate 6,000-strong National Rivers Authority, charged with the general management of river basins."

The hon. Gentleman was talking absolute rubbish, and he knows it.

I shall quote again from the Radio Cumbria interview. The hon. Gentleman said:

> "Individuals or their local authorities or their health authorities will not be able to bring charges against people who actually supply water which is unfit for human consumption."

The hon. Gentleman has not done his homework, because he has not read the Bill. It will make it a criminal offence, for the first time, for a water undertaker to supply piped water that is unfit for human consumption. Under the present law, that is not a criminal offence. That change is one of the many ways in which the Bill brings an improvement in safeguards for the consumer and the environment. The hon. Gentleman talked rubbish on that matter as well.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful for the fact that the Secretary of State has given way, if only to allow me to put on record my appreciation of the new doctrine that people go into radio broadcasts so that they will not be overheard.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that, under the new provisions, he and the Director of Public Prosecutions will determine whether actions are taken, and that members of the public, local authorities and even district health authorities will not be able to do so?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman knows that he is mixing up two different types of prosecution. When we come to detailed consideration of the Bill I shall be able to put him right on that as well.

I want to continue to take the hon. Gentleman to task for his broadcast. He said of me:

> "Why should we believe him when his own pollution inspectors have made it clear that they don't believe what Ministers are saying, and that's why they are resigning from his Department."

The hon. Gentleman is not good at listening, but I hope that he will listen now.

Mr. Perriman and the Department have agreed that, because of speculation in the press—much of it misinformed—the reason for his resignation may be stated publicly. The reason was disagreement about some elements of the proposals for reorganising Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in the regions. Those proposals are still the subject of consultation with staff representatives. Under the proposals, specialist teams of inspectors in each region would be matched with a particular class of industry. Mr. Perriman originally supported that proposal, but later changed his mind in favour of teams of multi-purpose inspectors allocated on a geographical basis.

I am sad that Mr. Perriman feels it necessary to resign over this matter, and I am sad to see him go, but that actually is his reason for going. In no sense is his reason for going anything to do with disagreements over the Government's policies or about lack of resources for the inspectorate. Our first task since Her Majesty's inspectorate was formed in April 1987 was to fill vacancies. We have been successful. Vacancies have fallen from 66 then to 19 now—out of 200 posts. It remains our objective to provide Her Majesty's inspectorate with the resources that it needs to do the job we have given it.

Dr. Cunningham: That seemed a long, boring and convoluted way of agreeing that pollution inspectors are resigning because they have differences of opinion on policy with the Secretary of State.

Mr. Ridley: That is not so. The hon. Gentleman is wrong. He is talking rubbish once more. Indeed, he seldom talks anything but rubbish. As I have said, Mr. Perriman disagrees with his colleagues in the inspectorate about how best to organise the inspectorate regionally.

My final quotation from the hon. Member is this:

> "The water authority managers are already talking about increases in costs to the consumer of between 50 and 80 per cent.—that's really a pretty clear signal to us that they are probably going to double in the short term and maybe in the longer term go up by two or three times."

That is what the hon. Gentleman said in that famous interview.

Again, the hon. Gentleman's suggestion of doubling or trebling water charges is absolute rubbish. I have made it clear that, on the known programmes of environmental improvements so far—cleaner beaches, drinking water quality and improvement to sewage treatment works—the necessary investment might increase prices by between 7·5 and 12·5 per cent. in real terms by the end of the century. It could well be more if further environmental improvements are necessary.

Of course, there are other factors, such as the higher cost of private sector capital, and so on, but the greater efficiency that we expect will work the other way. The increase in charges will be nowhere near the extravagant predictions of the hon. Gentleman. Doubling water charges would produce an extra £3 billion per annum: trebling them would produce £6 billion per annum. Those figures compare with an investment next year of £1·3 billion. His figures are miles wide of the mark and were produced with the deliberate intention of misleading and misinforming. Once more, I say that he was talking absolute rubbish.

What we have to contend with is that, when in government, the Labour party cut investment in the water services by a third, and, within that investment, in sewage treatment works by half. In our debate a fortnight ago the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) eventually got it right and had to admit that the Labour Government "had not wanted to" cut investment. We now have a strange new doctrine: "The Labour party wants to increase public investment, but has to cut it; apparently, the Tories want to cut it, but actually increase it." On the hon. Gentleman's own admission, that is what is happening. In fact, we have increased investment to over £1·3 billion next year. Those damaging cuts under Labour are the main reasons for the defects that still exist in the water environment, and we do not need to be lectured by Labour Members about this matter.

There is an underlying truth in all this. It is that pollution control costs money. That is why Socialist economies, which are not as successful as market economies, do not make the necessary investments in pollution control. In a controlled economy the resources are just not available.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn) *rose*——

Mr. Ridley: No, the hon. Gentleman must wait. He can make his speech later if he catches your eye, Mr. Speaker. It is worth telling him why Labour cut investment in water and sewerage. The International Monetary Fund told the Labour Government that they had to do so. The IMF came in because Government spending was way out of control. That is why there will never be the resources to make the necessary investment in the water industry if it remains in the public sector.

We now have a healthy economy that can afford to clean up the environment. The two go hand in hand. A strong and growing economy requires a good environment in which to flourish. Equally, environmental protection and improvement need the benefits of growth and a strong economy to meet the costs. The costs are high—amounting to several billions of pounds for our current environmental initiatives.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Secretary of State tell us why, after 10 years, Britain has the reputation of being the dirtiest nation in Europe? Could that have something to do with the raw sewage that the Secretary of State is delivering as his speech this afternoon?

Mr. Ridley: That is not true—[HON. MEMBERS: "Absolute rubbish."] The only thing that the Labour party seeks to do is to damage the reputation of this country by talking rubbish, as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was doing.

The polluter will have to pay for the increased investments. As a result of the successful agreement last week on motor car emissions, the motorist will have to pay a further £850 million annually. There will be increases in water charges to improve, first, the quality of beaches through the provision of long sea outfalls; secondly, quality water through the "Red List" controls over industrial discharges; and thirdly, sewage treatment works through the massive investment programme of upgrading.

To reduce SO_2 and NOx emissions substantially—one of which is the cause of acid rain—there will have to be an increase in the price of electricity. However, I want to make it clear that the price increases will be due not to privatisation, but to the improvements to the environment for which the Labour party has rightly asked. Labour Members will not be able to say later that the price increases are due to privatisation—[HON. MEMBERS: "Absolute rubbish."] We will take no lectures from the Labour party.

I turn not to the other major issue of environmental clean-up. The House might be amused to remember a contribution on this subject from the hon. Member for Copeland. On the eve of the last election the Labour party said that it would ban fox hunting. However, the hon. Gentleman suddenly remembered his own constituency and said, "but not in national park areas." That is the level of consistency within the Labour party. That is the extent to whch the Labour party's views are based on science. That is the hon. Gentleman's commitment to the environment—[HON. MEMBERS: "Absolute rubbish."] It is absolute rubbish from the Labour party. I do not know why the hon. Gentleman left out areas of outstanding natural beauty.

The amendment refers to a mythical Bill which the hon. Member for Copeland would like to see enacted,

> "to safeguard comprehensively the nation's environment and heritage".

No such Bill is needed. We will be presenting the House with a Bill as soon as possible, and certainly during this Parliament, to do the things that are not yet quite ready for introduction. They cover two significant but specific topics.

The first is the introduction of an integrated system to control industrial pollution, which will put Her Majesty's inspectors of pollution on a proper statutory footing and introduce a cross-media system of control that takes account of the unity of the natural environment. The second is the reform of waste disposal law to increase waste disposal authorities' powers to regulate waste disposal, to place a statutory duty of care on the producers and holders of waste and to control imports of wastes and fly tipping. Substantial changes to the legal infrastructure are needed before those measures can be brought forward. It is also necessary to have consultations with the authorities concerned and to get it right. I repeat, however, that that Bill will be introduced when we are ready, and during this Parliament. We do not need the mammoth declaratory Bill for which the Opposition are calling. We have a massive programme of environmental improvement which does not require legislation.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): As the Secretary of State is so worried about the problems of toxic waste disposal, will he continue to allow large quantities of toxic waste to be imported? If the toxic waste on Karin B were repackaged, would he allow it into Britain?

Mr. Ridley: It may be right for it to come here because we have specialist facilities for dealing with such material. The arrangements are that if it is suggested that a consignment of toxic waste is to come to Britain, prior notification must be given, with a proper analysis of the contents. If the hon. Gentleman is an environmentalist, he might agree that it could be better for such toxic waste to be treated in plants capable of treating it properly than to have it dumped in the sea or in some underdeveloped country which does not have the necessary facilities.

I should like now to consider the important issues which do not require legislation. I shall take first the ozone layer and the damage caused to it by CFCs. It is one of the most serious problems that we face and the one to which we are devoting the highest priority. We took a leading part in the negotiations that led to the Montreal protocol last year. We have developed scientific understanding further, and we have taken the initiative by calling for a cut of 85 per cent. in CFCs worldwide as soon as possible and a speeding up of implementation of the Montreal protocol.

[Mr. Ridley]

I announced last Wednesday that, next March, the Government will host an international ministerial conference on ozone depletion, with the objective of giving a further political impetus to more worldwide reductions in CFCs and to demonstrate practical reductions of at least 85 per cent. as soon as possible. I believe that it will have a substantial impact on helping developing countries, which could make or break the strategy to reduce the global use of ozone depleting chemicals, to come on board on this most vital of environmental subjects.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I applaud the fact that the Government have taken the initiative by calling a meeting so that the Montreal protocol can be developed, but will the Government put their money where their mouth is and be prepared to help Third world countries and those, such as India and China, which have said that they want to ensure that every household has a refrigerator by the end of the century, which would mean an enormous expansion in the use of CFCs? Will the Government allow aid and technology transfers to those countries so that they can implement some of the objectives of the Montreal protocol?

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has got the point about the conference. That is exactly what the conference will have to discuss. The point of the conference is to analyse the problems and the shortages of knowledge and funds so that we can get underdeveloped countries to accept the need to reduce CFCs in the light of solutions to their problems, which we can then develop. The hon. Gentleman is right. We shall be there to help them.

The hon. Member for Copeland referred to acid rain. We have undertaken to make a 60 per cent. reduction in SO_2 emissions from existing large power stations by the year 2003, and a 30 per cent. reduction in NOx emissions. That will involve further substantial expenditure, over and above the Central Electricity Generating Board's present £1 billion power station clean-up programme.

Dr. Cunningham: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), I welcome what the Secretary of State said about CFCs. Why have the Government discontinued funding of the pressurised fluidised bed combustion system at Grimethorpe, which was initiated by the Labour Government? It shows the way ahead in coal technology. It would deal with emissions of SO_2 and the oxides of nitrogen. Is it not shortsighted to allow that project to fold up?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman knows that the problem of high sulphur emissions arises because we have such high sulphur coal. We need the new technology, but the research to which he refers does not seem to be yielding the technology that we need, at least not in terms of SO_2.

Tighter vehicle emission standards which should halve emissions from cars have been brought in. Final agreement on a European Community package of measures was achieved by my noble Friend the Earl of Caithness in Brussels last week. The technology favoured by the Government for meeting the strict new Luxembourg standards is a lean-burn engine with an oxidation catalyst. This delivers the lower emissions demanded and promises fuel economy improvements that will be important as we tackle the greenhouse effect and try to minimise CO_2.

We believe that it is a superior option to the bolt-on approach of three-way catalytic converters, not least because of its robustness. Lean-burn engines reliably and permanently reduce emissions at source. Catalysts have to be expensively and regularly maintained. They can, and do, go wrong, and when that happens there is no reduction in emissions at all. Nor do they reduce CO_2.

Earlier this month the United Kingdom signed the NOx protocol at Sofia. It commits us to halt the hitherto inexorable rise in NOx emissions, to apply the best available technologies which are economically feasible to abate NOx emissions from the major sources, and by 1996 to have adopted policies based on the scientifically evaluated "critical loads" which the environment can tolerate. Achieving international agreement to base policy on scientific knowledge is a major breakthrough. I am confident that the measures we are taking to reduce emissions for power stations and vehicles will result in a substantial decrease in United Kingdom NOx emissions.

Despite what the hon. Member for Copeland said, last year we achieved all our goals with regard to the North sea conference, and we can implement them without further legislation. I shall remind the House of what they are: an end to marine incineration by the end of 1994, the stopping of dumping of harmful industrial wastes into the North sea by the end of 1989 and a reduction in inputs of more damaging substances into rivers by 50 per cent. by 1995. All those measures are now being applied to all our seas.

The hon. Member for Copeland mentioned repairs to the housing stock. The English house condition survey, which is carried out every five years, provides the best indication of our progress towards securing better housing conditions. The 1986 survey is published today, and the results are encouraging. The report shows that the overall condition of the stock has improved since the previous survey in 1981. That reflects substantial private spending on the maintenance and renovation of the stock, which increased by 30 per cent. in real terms between 1981 and 1986. Public sector spending on improvement grants for private owners more than doubled, and spending on the renovation of council houses increased by 60 per cent. over the same period. The new policies that we are introducing will lead to even more rapid progress in the improvement of the housing stock.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman referred to mortgage interest. I have the building societies' press release here, which states that, far from there being a great increase in arrears and repossessions by building societies,

> "In the first six months of 1988 building societies took possession of 2,100, or 19 per cent., fewer properties compared with the previous six month period . . . The number of building society loans in arrears for six months or over is also down. At the end of June 1988 the number of loans in arrears for six months or more was 2,000 lower than at the end of 1987 and around 4,000 lower than a year earlier. The decline in the number of possessions and arrears is consistent with the improvement in the performance of the economy in recent years and, in particular, the sharp fall in unemployment which began in the middle of 1986."

Therefore, the hon. Gentleman's fears about mortgages are not so far borne out.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Those figures come from building societies. Would the Secretary of State care to look at loans and repossessions by local authorities?

Mr. Ridley: I am happy to look at that, but I am quoting from the building societies, which are the main lenders.

Yesterday I heard the Leader of the Opposition on the radio, and for the sake of greater accuracy I obtained a copy of what he said. He said of the Chancellor of the Exchequer:

> "He won't even think of the possibility of trying to control new requirements for borrowing. Not harming the current industrial borrowing, not harming the current consumer borrowing but actually gradually getting demand squeezed in this economy which, because of the explosion, it has to be, doing it in such a way as not to hit those people who borrowed in good faith either for current purchase of houses or for the financing of industrial development."

If one can disentangle that, the right hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting a system whereby interest rates will increase for new borrowing, but not for existing borrowing. That is what it means. If it does not mean that, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can tell us what it does mean, because he suggested that as a great solution to our economic problems. As I am anxious about the mortgage scene, I should like to know what it means. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I am asking the right hon. Gentleman, but he is not prepared to rise. If he is not prepared to deny that that is what his statement means, I shall put it again. The Chancellor should control new borrowing

> "in such a way as not to hit those people who borrowed in good faith either for current purchase of houses or for the financing of industrial development."

What is the right hon. Gentleman going to do? He knows full well that we cannot increase interest rates for new borrowings only. He knows that that is rubbish. He is talking just as much rubbish as his hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

Improvements to housing, new housing, repairs to housing, and investment in water, sewerage and the environment, let alone all the other matters that command the interest and attention of this House, cost a great deal of money. Yet I believe that we can have both the necessary economic growth, without which the resources to pay for these improvements will not be possible, and the measures to clean up the environment. Most of what needs to be done does not require legislation, but where legislation is required, as in the Water Bill, we shall not hesitate to act. My commitment to safeguarding the environment and the heritage and to the future of the planet is no less real, because it is founded on careful research and science. Unlike the Labour Government, this party has made available in government the resources to deliver all those commitments.

4.55 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): If I had the command of the English language which the Secretary of State has, I would describe his speech as absolute rubbish, but I do not need to comment on it because the face of the Patronage Secretary, which the Secretary of State could not see, told all. I noticed that he left the Chamber the moment that the right hon. Gentleman sat down. The Secretary of State spoke about the environment, but I intend to speak about a subject which used to be fairly close to the right hon. Gentleman's heart—the economy and trade. I understand that the Minister for Trade may reply to the debate.

There are about 25 paragraphs in the Gracious Speech, of which only two relate to the economy, which may present a more serious problem than the environment. After 10 years of Conservative party rule Britain has by far the worst inflation rate of all our major industrial competitors and it is getting worse. It will probably be 8 per cent. next year and who knows what it will be the following year. Our level of unemployment, despite recent falls, is still higher than that of many of our competitors. We have the highest level of real interest rates in the whole of the Western world and our balance of payments deficit is horrendous. Apart from the United States, whose deficits are also horrendous, we have the worst balance of payments deficit of all Western industrial countries. Practically all our competitors are either in considerable surplus or have small, manageable deficits. That is the position to which the Prime Minister's policies have brought our economy.

In 1979 the Government were elected on their main promise to defeat inflation—not just to control or reduce it, but to slay the dragon itself. Now, 10 years later, we read in the Gracious Speech on the subject of inflation the words:

> "My Government will . . . bear down on inflation"

—a phrase of mandarin blandness which reflects the Government's uncertainty and lack of confidence in being able to do so.

I shall deal briefly, not with inflation, but with another indicator of the health of a country's economy and in particular of its productive capacity, which is the balance of payments. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has repeatedly told us that he is not worried about the balance of payments. The balance of payments, we are blandly told, always balances and that is that. But I think that privately the Chancellor does worry and if he does not, I am sure that his officials worry. If the Chancellor were able to announce a balance of payments surplus which was merely 10 per cent. of that achieved by the West Germans, he would put on his velvet suit and his gold medallion and dance in the streets.

Of course the balance of payments must balance. A balance has to balance. Every balance sheet has to balance. The Barlow Clowes balance sheet balanced, but it did not do the investors much good. The real question is not whether the balance of payments balances, but how it balances. Does it balance with a plus as it does in Germany and Japan, or does it balance with a minus as it does in Britain? Is it above the line, or below the line? As we all know, the Government, who pride themselves on their financial rectitude, balance with a minus—£15 billion below the line this year, probably another £15 billion below the line next year and who knows what will happen in the following year? All one can say with confidence is that it will be a minus, and substantially below the line.

The greatest deterioration in our trade balance has been with the rest of the EEC—our main trading partners and the countries with which we have more than 50 per cent. of our trade. That deterioration did not take place overnight, last month or the month before. It started just after 1981. In 1981 we had a current account surplus—that is a visible trade surplus—with the countries of the EEC of £973 million. By 1984, three years later, that surplus had become a deficit of £2·3 billion. By 1986, the deficit had

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

grown to £8·8 billion. Last year, in 1987, the deficit was £13 billion. Perhaps the Minister of Trade and Industry can tell us what it will be this year and next year, because the Treasury will not. When questions are tabled asking the Treasury to forecast this year's and next year's visible trade deficit with the EEC, apparently it does not know or does not want to tell.

In 1981 the manufactures trade deficit was £3·4 billion and last year it was almost £11 billion—an increase of almost 350 per cent. That is a deficit not with countries such as Taiwan or South Korea or with countries which pay low wages or use sweated labour, but with countries with a higher standard of living, higher wages and better public and welfare services than we have in Britain. By and large, they are countries that have not followed the fashion of radical Right ideology that has been embraced by Britain and the United States during the past 10 years. All the countries in Europe that have not done so seem to have a surplus while Britain and the United States have a deficit. Perhaps that is a coincidence which we can debate on another occasion.

Do the Government really believe that their present policies of merely raising the interest rates will dent, let alone substantially reduce, that massive deficit with EEC countries, especially with 1992 approaching and all the other trade barriers within the EEC being brought down? I read all the sophisticated comments in the press about interest rates, but as far as I can see, by putting up interest rates the Chancellor makes the deficit worse, as the CBI pointed out today.

A German manufacturer is very fortunate in that he can borrow at about 5 per cent. A British manufacturer now has to pay at least 13 per cent. A small manufacturer here probably has to pay 15 or 16 per cent. while his German competitor has to pay 5 per cent. Of course, the 13 per cent. British interest rate puts up the value of the pound against the deutschmark. At lunchtime today there were 3·19 deutschmarks to the pound. Therefore, German imports become even cheaper, British exports become even more expensive and the trade gap worsens. The same consequences apply with most of the countries of the EEC, although on a smaller scale. After 10 years of the Government's policies Britain is ceasing to be a major producer country that can compete effectively with its EEC partners in a whole range of goods. I concede that during that 10-year period there has been some improvement in productivity in some industries. I believe that most of that improvement is the result of high unemployment. However, despite the improvement, there is not enough industry left in Britain and the skills are not available to enable us to compete on a large scale with our EEC partners.

The Chancellor says that it does not matter and that nobody will worry about the deficit so long as it can be financed. Wise men nod at that, go away and do not think about it, but how is it being financed? Some of it—I do not know how much as we cannot get the figures these days but perhaps about 20 per cent.—is being financed out of what used to be called direct investment from abroad through purchases of land, bricks and mortar and factories. At least such investment is fairly stable. The bricks and mortar, the factories and the land cannot leave overnight. When Nestlé bought Rowntrees for about £2 billion, the Chancellor must have been delighted. He must have been dancing with joy because at that time—not very long ago—£2 billion in Swiss francs would have financed his deficit for about four months. Now it would finance his deficit for only one month, or perhaps even less than that, on the basis of last week's figures. The Chancellor now needs to sell practically every month to finance the deficit.

Just as internally the Government are selling off public assets to help finance and reduce their borrowing requirement—we heard today about the water and electricity industries—to finance their own public expenditure and bring down the percentage total of GDP, they are happy and delighted to sell British industry to overseas buyers to finance their external deficit.

Direct investments finance only a small part of the deficit. The rest is being financed by what used to be described as "hot money"—money that now can leave the country at the touch of a button. That money can go into stocks and shares, but no one is buying stocks and shares at the moment because of the lack of confidence in the Government's economic policies. In theory, it could be invested in Government stock, but there is not much of that around, because, as the Chancellor boasts at the Dispatch Box, the Government are repaying the national debt and are not issuing stock. It is curious that the yield on longer-term Government stock is less than what it would earn in the bank.

Why should a foreign investor buy medium-term gilts when he can get far more by putting the money on bank deposit? Of course, that is what is happening. The Chancellor does not worry about the deficit. He does not care about it, he just wants to finance it. Frankly, it is being financed by the hottest of hot money—that is, bank deposits. It is no wonder that at 3.30 pm last Friday the Chancellor rushed to put up interest rates to 13 per cent. If he had not, by this afternoon half those deposits would have left the country and sterling would have been under pressure.

The Chancellor is now a prisoner of external events which are completely outside his control. If, for example, the new American President were forced to put up American base rates by 2 per cent. to protect the dollar, the Chancellor would have to put up the British interest rates by 2 per cent. immediately because he would have to stop the flight of money out of London and into New York and so maintain the exchange rate differential. Paradoxically and ironically, if the dollar recovered, the Chancellor would have problems again as there would be a flight of money from London to New York and the pound would be under pressure.

What is to be done about the enormous balance of payments deficit, especially—this is the heart of the problem—the deficit with the rest of Western Europe? In the end the Government will be forced—it gives me no pleasure to say this—either by market forces or by a sense of economic reality, to try to negotiate Britain into full membership of the European monetary system. That would involve a substantial reduction in the value of the pound against the deutschmark and the realignment of other currencies in the EMS. The Chancellor wanted to do that at the beginning of the year. He, or his officials, spotted what was likely to happen, and tried gradually to bring down interest rates, and in doing so, to bring down the value of the pound against the deutschmark without anybody—perhaps not even those at No. 10—noticing that we were slowly slithering into the EMS.

As 1992 approaches, and further trade barriers come down, Britain's economy will, unfortunately, have to be submerged and pulled into the stronger economies of Western Europe. The Prime Minister will not like it—indeed, most of us in the House will not like it. However, if that comes about—as I believe it will—it will be as a result of the Government's mismanagement of the economy over the past 10 years and it will signal an ironic and ignominious end to what has been described as Thatcherism and to the Thatcherite economic revolution.

5.11 pm

Mr. Michael Heseltine (Henley): I shall return to the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the references that he made to water privatisation. I strongly support the inclusion of that proposal in the Gracious Speech. I say that as a former Secretary of State for the Environment who went through the annual expenditure round. Year after year, I saw the processes of attrition whereby the demand-led, index-linked, and consumption programmes of Government pre-empted ever larger claims on national resources. At the end of the day, when the spending departments are up against the wall and the Star Chamber meets, it is the capital programmes that go. The capital programmes went out under the previous Labour Government and in part, though not on the same scale, it was the capital programmes that suffered in the early years of this Government. The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) referred to cuts in council house sales as if they started under this Government. However, we all know that they started in 1976 when the International Monetary Fund came in and precisely the same happened to the investment in the water industries.

The essential strength of my right hon. Friend's case is that he is separating the regulatory and unavoidable responsibilities of the Government from the management and provision of infrastructure, which can be handled by private sector endeavour. What will then happen—I hope that my right hon. Friend has given sufficient determination to this aspect of his policy—is that my noble Friend Lord Crickhowell will be in the driving seat to improve the standards because he will not be preoccupied with the public expenditure consequences of what he is trying to do.

The issue is simple. Do we want to move faster towards higher environmental standards in water provision and sewage disposal? I believe that the Government and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State are right to say that we do and it cannot be denied that a major way of achieving that is to privatise the water industry and allow the Government to do what Government are unavoidably responsible for doing, which is to enhance the standards of environmental protection. In the last resort it is that by which the measure stands or fails. It is a measure for environmental protection and is to be welcomed in that context.

I understand the Labour party's resentment of the statements that we are making. However, in 1979 we inherited a programme of reduced capital expenditure. The Opposition did not see the consequences of the cuts that they were making. I say at once that they did not make the cuts of their own volition but were forced to do so by the random and reckless economic policies that they pursued. If we want to escape from that, the essential first step is to separate the regulatory processes from the investment processes. I strongly support that process and I hope that my noble Friend Lord Crickhowell will take the high environmental road available to him.

I want to make three points about the Government's environmental policies and get them in a context which is wider than national policy. First, without a doubt, the environment has now become a big responsibility of the Government and I believe that that responsibility will grow. Secondly, the little perceived but important commercial and entrepreneurial opportunities of rising environmental standards are already large and, if carefully administered, they can become dramatically more important to Britain. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Trade and Industry is present to hear the debate.

Thirdly, because the responsibilities have become increasingly significant for the Government and because the commercial opportunities for enhanced environmental standards are so exciting, it would be less than surprising if there were not geo-political controversies on the horizon. I believe that in the environmental debate we will shortly see a re-run of the unilateral peace arguments of the 1960s and 1980s.

Let us have no repetition of the nonsense of Opposition Members when they suggest that it is not the duty or the wish of the Conservative party to achieve higher environmental standards. It is the responsibility of the Government to do that. There will always be somebody in an unfettered market place who pressures the standards at the lower end and thus destroys the environmental standards that it is the Government's responsibility to uphold. The only way in which that can be prevented is by environmental regulation by the Government. The Government, like all preceding Governments, have been deeply immersed in that process.

It is increasingly clear that environmental regulation is not sufficient, even in the hands of the largest and richest country, to achieve protection of the environment in the areas of world concern. It is relatively easy for Governments to agree about the rhetoric, the phrases and the grand objectives, but it will be difficult for Governments with different backgrounds, attitudes and practices and at different stages of development to accept the environmental standards that will add up to a global protection of the environment.

The Government are courageously and rightly setting out in a series of speeches their views about the broad issues. However, a growing number of people are advancing arguments against aspects of the Government's policies, attacking one place here and another place there. That is a perfectly legitimate feature of a democratic process and none should gainsay it. I hope that the Government will see the need to produce an omnibus response to their environmental policies. An environment White Paper would draw together the general objectives. It should set out the targets the Government have in mind, the agencies, most of which will be international, with which they see the targets being achieved and some idea of the cost and the pace at which all that could be made possible. It is of paramount importance to Conservative Members to be able to advance behind the Government's environmental case with the legitimate pride that comes with being able to show a coherent approach to the issue. I believe that an environment White Paper would be a significant contribution to the debate.

[Mr. Michael Heseltine]

My second point concerns the commercial opportunities. It is easy for critics of the Government to see them as always interfering or involving themselves in some aspect of commercial activity and, indeed, to view the regulatory responsibilities of Government as being in some way the intrusions of over-anxious or energetic civil servants. That is one way to look at it.

There will be those in the commercial world—usually those enthusiastic about the lowest standards—who will use just such arguments. I very much hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Trade and Industry will perceive a quite different set of opportunities. I remind him —although he needs no reminding—of what happened when the Conservative party introduced health and safety at work legislation in the early 1970s. Some criticised us for intervening, but once we had made such a major step forward to improve the environment of the British people at work a whole range of industries emerged to meet the new standards that the Government had imposed by regulation.

It is quite apparent that this market place of a one nation state is not large enough to have a world impact on the standards of industry. If Europe, as a group of nation states, adopts one standard for each country, it will be the Americans and the Japanese who, through the protection of their market by regulatory processes, will set the world standards. If Britain, through the British Government operating in Europe, wants to influence the world market place and world standards, it must be done in concert with the European single market, which will come into existence in 1992. Our national market will be subsumed in that market place.

The responsibility of Government must be to be sure that, in Britain's self-interest, we seek to influence the standards of the European market place—not only because we want to impact upon the world environmental condition, but because if the British Government do that we shall make the best deal that we can for British industry, commerce and manufacturing interests. There is a fundamental interest in ensuring that within the cohesion of Europe we influence what is happening both for environmental purposes and to secure the job and investment opportunities that a properly regulated environmental process can achieve.

My third and final point is more controversial, but I do not hesitate to make it. Those of us who are veterans of the debate about the modernisation of NATO's intermediate nuclear systems in the early 1980s, which led to the deployment of cruise and Pershing 2s in Europe, were familiar with the many different groups arguing the unilateral cause. I would be the last to suggest that all those groups were supportive of or sympathetic to the Soviet cause, but a significant number of them were. The more that that link between Soviet interests and the unilateral cause became clear, the more discredited became the unilateral cause in this country.

It was something of a nostalgic trip down memory lane for me to read Mr. Shevardnadze's speech in September —incidentally, on the same day that an excellent speech on the same subject was made by the British Prime Minister —in which he referred—*[Interruption.]* The Prime Minister's speech was intellectually of a very high standard, so Opposition Members probably would not have understood it even if they could have read it. Mr. Shevardnadze's speech referred to green peace. However, he was referring not to the organisation that leads so many environmental protection causes, but to a link between the old concepts of nuclear disarmament and the environmental interests not only of enhanced standards in the Soviet Union, but of other Soviet interests. It is important that we in the western world understand the linkage that the Soviets now perceive in the new concept of green peace.

Mr. Allan Roberts *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: I shall not give way because I have been asked to be as brief as possible.

Mr. Roberts *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The right hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Mr. Roberts: Well, the right hon. Gentleman intervened.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Mr. Heseltine: Mr. Gorbachev specifically wants to prevent West Germany accepting the modernisation of NATO's short-range weapons systems. He also wants western technology to help modernise his economy and thus enable it more effectively to carry the weight of the Soviet defence burden. No one should be surprised at the link in recent Soviet speeches of the nuclear defence issue with the imperative to clean up the environment.

In reality, there has been no reduction in Soviet defence expenditure and it possesses a wholly indefensible superiority of conventional weapons, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary told the House last Friday. The Soviets will seek to persuade the West Germans to legitimise that conventional superiority by failing to modernise our short-range deterrent. They will argue that they want fewer nuclear weapons so that they can spend money thus released on environmental standards. They will suggest that if the West transfers technology to them, they will speed the process of environmental enhancement. I have no doubt that the Government will expose the military fallacy, while taking care not to concede for environmental purposes what the Soviets will too easily exploit for military purposes.

We all know that the Soviet Union, through its space programme and through the sophistication of its weapons systems, is perfectly capable of developing technological excellence if it suits its long-term objectives, but while it spends 15 per cent. of its gross domestic product on a defence programme it will starve its environmental and industrial base. When we, rightly anxious to clean the environment and preserve higher standards, approach those issues, it is of fundamental importance that we do not prejudice the defence interests of the western world by too easily allowing the Soviet Union to get away with maintaining a level of defence expenditure that starves it of the resources to improve its environment.

Environmental issues will have a profound effect on the arguments of the next decade. I strongly support the Government's policy of playing a proper role in that. It will be increasingly international in its approach. I very much hope that there will be a coherent statement, preferably a White Paper, dealing with those issues in order better to inform those of us who wish to support the Government's endeavour.

5.28 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): Before coming to the main thrust of my speech I wish to make a passing reference to one of the most blatantly ideological and dogmatic pieces of legislation that this Government have introduced—and for this Government that is saying a lot. I am, of course, referring to water privatisation. The Secretary of State was at his most ludicrous when he referred to that, as I am sure the whole House appreciated.

I represent a constituency in the north-west of England that is often referred to as the cradle of the industrial revolution. Much of its infrastructure was laid in the 19th century and is now crumbling. Inadequate but steady progress has been made during the last few years, despite the financial restrictions imposed by the Government, to improve the quality of water, to develop the environment and, crucially, to rehabilitate the infrastructure.

After privatisation, the income generated from water will almost certainly be creamed off into less essential areas. If other privatisation measures are anything to go by, the money will be spent on increased salaries, directors' dividends and the duplication of the National Rivers Authority. I am sure my hon. Friends will agree that the water industry needs investment, not ideology.

The water mains in my region are severely overloaded and outdated. About 600,000 homes are supplied through corroded lead pipes, and 40 per cent. of the main pipes suffer from unacceptable mineral deposits that reduce the standards of our water. Sewer collapses are the highest in the country and average two a day. There were more than 700 bad storm overflows last year, which carried raw sewage into the rivers—half of Britain's total. The problems need to be dealt with urgently, through investment, so that the region's water is at least up to 19th century standards by the time it reaches the 21st century. Public opinion shows that the majority of people oppose the Government on water privatisation. I hope that the Department of the Environment will carefully reconsider before introducing legislation.

I want to deal with one aspect of the Gracious Speech that affects millions of people. It is regrettable that my old sparring partner, the Minister with responsibility for sport, is not present. With the Minister for Water and Planning, he has the unenviable task of piloting through the water privatisation measure. But he has other interests, too. As the miniature for sport, as he is affectionately known these days, he is "irresponsible" for the idea of identity cards for football supporters. I feel slightly sorry for him, because he has the heavy hand, or, more accurately, the knee-jerk response, of No. 10 behind him, aided and abetted by the more irresponsible Ministers from Marsham street.

The very basis of the identity card scheme is faulty. The Government's thinking seems to be that identity cards must be used by supporters to enter grounds; that those guilty of hooliganism will have their cards removed; and that therefore, by definition, football games will end up by being attended only by peaceful supporters. The fundamental weakness of that approach is that the police rarely catch or successfully prosecute hooligans who commit acts of violence, mostly outside football grounds. The proposed legislation will not help the police, and many senior police have clearly said so. The existing provisions for exclusion and attendance orders are more effective at keeping criminals away from matches than plastic identity cards can ever be.

The Minister contradicted himself yesterday when, in an interview, he said, "Exclusion orders worked." Later, he said that, as yet, there is

"no method to stop those excluded from one club from going to another".

Exclusion orders could do precisely that if they were implemented effectively.

Last season, 6,147 supporters were arrested at matches, and only 1,089 had exclusion orders imposed upon them to keep them away from football. If exclusion orders are not the answer, why did the Government introduce them in the first place? Instead of the commonsense approach, the Government have hit upon a populist, tabloid-inspired approach to identity cards. With identity cards, the Government appear to be responding to the perceived problem. However, now that the population at large are being apprised of the true facts, the Government will find that they have miscalculated.

Those 6,147 arrests represented just 0·03 per cent. of the 18 million supporters who went to league games—that is, on average, fewer than three arrests per match. Put in the context of society as a whole—something that the Government have continuously failed to do with the measure—according to the Home Office's own figures, that figure is revealing when compared with the 3·7 per cent. of the adult population arrested in Britain in 1987. On the basis of the Minister's approach, the average citizen will be safer inside a football ground than outside it. It is a good job that the football authorities have not taken that view and over the past few years have taken real steps in line with the Popplewell report recommendations.

Mr. Carlisle (Luton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pendry: Because of the time factor, I shall not give way.

Mr. Carlisle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on this occasion?

Mr. Pendry: I shall not give way on this occasion.

Better segregation, closed-circuit television cameras, close co-operation between clubs, the police and the community and, let us face it, Government-inspired partial membership schemes have all but removed the old problem of violence within grounds. There are still pockets to be worked at, and we all accept that, but just eight of the 2,500 matches played last season suffered reportable incidents within the grounds—I repeat, within the grounds. Clearly, the Government are tackling the hooliganism problem by using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

Mr. Carlisle *rose*——

Mr. Pendry: I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman knows that I shall not give way to him. I hope that he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I am sure that he has something useful to say, but I wish to adhere to the strictures from the Chair.

In terms of civil liberties for British citizens, Opposition Members and millions of genuine football supporters

[Mr. Pendry]

consider the scheme to be grossly offensive. Supporters get no benefit from it. Yesterday the Minister stated that ID cards were

"all for the privilege of being able to go to football."

The remark is offensive to many football supporters. Until now, it has been a legitimate right for our people so to do.

However, more sinister in the report is the plan to feed into the scheme police computer files, not just of convicted criminals, but of people who are arrested, people who are suspected of foul play, and supporters who are ejected from grounds, for whatever reason.

Mr. Carlisle *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) has made it abundantly clear on two occasions that he is not giving way.

Mr. Pendry: I have heard the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) so many times that I am sure he will not convince me on this occasion.

Football supporters are clearly being used as guinea pigs to test identity cards for all our citizens. If the Government really believe in identity cards, they should be bold enough to introduce them through legislation.

Mr. Carlisle *rose*——

Mr. Pendry: My major objection, not only to the hon. Gentleman's interruptions, but to identity cards, is that they show how much the Government and the Minister with responsibility for sport are out of touch with football. Hon. Members should take just one corner of the capital city of London as an example. Three clubs—Spurs, Arsenal and Leyton Orient—lucidly show the reality of football in 1988. After consultation with the police, the Tottenham Hotspur club is actually removing fences, because they are no longer needed. Clearly, the police believe that Spurs' supporters behave themselves.

At Highbury, the cup replay between Arsenal and Liverpool graphically spelt out the problems that I am trying to illustrate. At 7.15 pm on 9 November, 25,000 supporters were in the ground. At 8 pm, with the kick-off already delayed, about 54,000 were inside, and 6,000 were locked out. The checking of 54,000 identity cards would have created utter chaos. The match would have had to kick off at midnight. The Minister will say that supporters should get to grounds earlier, but how can they do so for a mid-week game? That is the kind of nonsensical comment that we have come to expect from him. His best quote was in a recent article, when he said:

"Do you know that there are more people go fishing than go to football, and we have less trouble with fishing".

That shows just how out of touch the Minister is to compare a solitary participatory sport with by far the biggest spectator sport in this country.

At Leyton Orient, the last of my examples, the problems are different. Like many small clubs, it will be driven to the wall by this scheme. It already has difficulty making ends meet. The estimated 56 per cent. fall off in support, according to a national opinion poll this weekend —which, incidentally, showed that twice as many genuine supporters oppose the scheme as support it—could shut down Leyton Orient once and for all. That is why clubs have pledged support for all hon. Members who oppose the planned legislation.

Identity cards for football supporters are opposed from every quarter. Many hon. Members stand alongside 91 of the 92 clubs which consider identity cards to be costly and irrelevant. The 92nd club——

Mr. Carlisle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pendry: No, I shall not give way.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made it perfectly clear on more than one occasion that he is not prepared to give way. This is very time consuming.

Mr. Carlisle: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has referred—albeit in a roundabout way—to my constituency. Is it not the custom of the House that those hon. Members who have a constituency involvement should be allowed to make some sort of reply?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is entirely for the hon. Gentleman who has the Floor at the time to determine whether he will give way. The hon. Gentleman has made it clear that he is not doing so.

Mr. Pendry: The 92nd club, Luton Town, proves the point, despite the Minister's utterances. I shall now give way to the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle).

Mr. Carlisle: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy, albeit a little late. As he rightly said, the representatives of Luton Town are in favour of the scheme. He must accept that the situation at Luton Town is different from what it was two years ago when we introduced the membership scheme. He must also accept that millions of our people are worried about safety in their towns, let alone at their football grounds. Luton is now a safe place for young and old people, even when a football match is going on, and that is purely because of the membership only scheme. Is the hon. Gentleman concerned only with the interests of football clubs, or is he also concerned about people outside football clubs?

Mr. Pendry: If Luton Town wishes to pursue its present policy, it should be entitled to do so. No two clubs are the same, and there should be flexibility so that Luton Town can pursue its present policy, however mistaken we may think it is.

I shall now deal with why I think Luton Town is wrong. The Minister is always quoting Luton Town, and he has claimed that the club has saved £100,000 on police bills. However, if one reads the reports from Luton Town, one finds that during the first two years of its 100 per cent. scheme police costs rose dramatically, and that only last season did those costs fall from their high peak.

The Minister also claims that attendances by home supporters have risen by 38 per cent. Last year, attendances at Luton Town fell by 27 per cent. That was in a season when the club won the Littlewoods cup, reached Wembley three times, was ninth in the league and reached a cup semi-final. Many clubs which do not have such a record, and which have the sort of gates that Luton has, which on average are below second division level, will go to the wall. Hon. Members who represent constituencies with small clubs should remember that this scheme will almost certainly see the demise of those clubs.

The Minister said that the only arrest at Luton last season was outside the ground. The Minister is not in the Chamber, but will the Secretary of State for the Environment ask him to break down, on the same basis, the national figure of 6,147? Will such a breakdown prove that the vast bulk of arrests elsewhere are also not within grounds? The Minister bandies statistics about, so he has a duty to give us that breakdown.

Supporters are united in their opposition to the scheme. Rogan Taylor of the Football Supporters Association was speaking for millions of genuine football supporters when he said:

> "This is a plan for football from people who have never passed through a turnstile, they have taken no advice from us the supporters."

Earlier, the Minister with responsibility for sport was wearing his Charlton Athletic tie. He does that when he deems it to be advantageous. He falls into the category of not understanding the game, and his oft-quoted example of hooliganism at the recent Millwall *v.* Newcastle game highlights that. I am informed by those who were near the Minister at that time that his main concern was to be photographed with Dee Jay Bear, and that the incident to which he referred was hardly noticed by those closer to the occurrence than he was. An identity card scheme would have been of little use at that game, as there were no arrests inside the ground that day.

Finally, and perhaps most damning of all, most police forces oppose the identity card scheme.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Will the hon. Gentleman give way to someone who has Stockport County in his constituency?

Mr. Pendry: No, I shall not give way. I dare not say too much about Stockport County, because it is close to my constituency.

As I was saying, most police forces oppose the identity card scheme. Those at the sharp end who are in charge of policing football matches condemn identity cards. The chairman of the Police Federation said:

> "Surges at big matches will create injuries and possibly fatalities . . . it will create more trouble on the streets."

Opposition to the scheme could hardly be blunter. I feel sorry for those who live around football grounds, because their problems will multiply if the scheme goes through. Football is a vital part of our way of life and, as an industry, it generates hundreds of millions of pounds for the Exchequer. More important, it gives hours of pleasure to millions of genuine football supporters. The Government are out to destroy our national game with this plan.

Twenty years ago, in his classic book "The Football Man", Arthur Hopcraft wrote:

> "It has not been only a game for eighty years. What happens on the football field matters, not in the way that food matters but as poetry does to some people . . . it engages the personality."

Bill Shankly perhaps overstated its significance when he uttered the immortal words:

> "Football's not a matter of life and death, it's more important than that."

It is clear that the Minister with responsibility for sport has got it wrong. He and his boss in No. 10 are the real hooligans and are setting out to destroy football with this idiotic scheme. The survival of our national game is at stake The Government should drop this monstrous proposal before it is to late to save our game.

5.45 pm

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): I enter this field of combat with some trepidation. I sensed that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) had gone through the yellow card barrier and was approaching the red card. I am slightly disconcerted to find that my old friend the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) has become a poet in the later years of our parliamentary acquaintance.

The Gracious Speech says:

> "My Government will continue to . . . promote enterprise and to foster the conditions necessary for the sustained growth of output and employment."

Competitiveness is the biggest challenge that faces industry. I should like to identify three areas where the Government, who are non-interventionist, have a duty to understand a little more clearly their relationship with trade and industry. They also have a duty to realise that they have a duty as entrepreneurs and promoters of enterprise.

There is no doubt that the Government have helped in industry's remarkable recovery. There are basic relationships between Government and industry that I commend to my right hon. and hon. Friends because they need special attention. First, I shall identify where I think trade and industry and the environment meet. They meet in the area of the needs and problems of transportation. The Government brought more private investment to British Airways, to the British Airports Authority and to other companies through the privatisation process. I should like to see the Government identify their responsibility more clearly to ensure that our trade flows smoothly.

There is a consequential cost to our business efficiency caused by the unacceptable, inaccurate forecasting techniques employed by the Department of Transport. The problem is made worse by the permanent lack of understanding by the Treasury of the duty of the Government to invest taxpayers' money to enable citizens to go about their business efficiently and effectively. That combination does not show the priority that is essential for Britain to be able to trade more effectively. We have only to look at the extraordinary chaos of the London traffic jams to see that the police and traffic wardens do not give priority to making sure that our main traffic routes are kept clear of illegally parked vehicles.

The year 1992 is getting closer, and on 1 January 1993 we shall all be expected to rush forward with new enterprise and to take advantage of new opportunities. There is no doubt that Britain's transport problems are growing faster than the solutions. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in my part of the country in south-east England where we are very much aware that the east-west routes south of London—the M20, the M2 and the M25—are already over the limit at most times of the day and night. The alternative south coast route, which has been promised and which will run through my constituency, will be a series of single carriageway bypasses until the 21st century. That will be the main alternative route, however, for Channel tunnel traffic to reach the south and west of the country.

We are faced with the paradox of the Treasury, which is awash with taxpayers' revenue, failing to invest in

[Mr. Kenneth Warren]

worthwhile enterprises and yet urging the public to invest in such enterprises. With transport, demand is far greater than supply. We are also faced with the extraordinary situation that money is allocated to projects, such as the bypass around Pevensey, and yet that money is not spent. My neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), and myself, together with other Members representing Sussex, discussed this matter only last week. It highlights the problems that can arise if integrating the needs of different Government Departments goes too far, but the Government must understand the multi-responsibilies of the Departments of Trade and Industry, Transport and the Environment. They must get things going so that our people are ready to offer good transportation services by 1 January 1993.

My feelings about the increases in interest rates are best illustrated by quoting the experiences of two young gentlemen in my constituency who have set up a shopfitting business. It has a turnover of just over £50,000 a year and it is moving ahead. Those men have families and both own small houses. In the past six months, however, their mortgages have just about doubled. They were counting on the cash that they must now pay in extra mortgage interest to further their business.

When the Government consider the macro-economic scale and the value of higher interest rates, I hope that they will consider the plight of the young people whom we have encouraged to be enterprising, to develop their business spirit, and to go out to the market place to sell their endeavours. They are paying a high price for their enterprising spirit. I am sure that the Government will think about those people who are working hard five or six days a week.

We have a non-interventionist Government who have made rapid strides in reducing the size of the Civil Service. In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls), I believe that the Government should consider the burden that is placed on young people because of Government requirements for fiscal returns and information and data of all kinds. Providing that information often consumes between 12 and 15 hours of a working week for a small business.

What will 1992 mean? It is not just a matter of one single, large trade area in Europe which will enjoy all the opportunities that have already been identified. The European Economic Community must be capable of combating the great and growing surge of enterprise from east Asia, and, in particular, from Japan.

There is no doubt that, in 1992, some of our strong industries, such as steel and retailing, will become stronger and that their success will pull other companies through. We must heed the warning of what happened, however, in 1973. Then we thought that we would do well from our membership of the Community, but we found that other countries did better than we did from our entry.

Post 1992, the problem that will face the EEC will be the competitive and economic strength of eastern Asia. Presently, our export record within the EEC is a problem and we must seek to solve it in the next few years. There are only three countries within the EEC—Greece, Ireland and Spain—with which we are in surplus in export manufactures. Our deficit with West Germany is now running at more than £14 million a year, which represents more than half of our total deficit with the EEC. That is worrying when one considers that West Germany has a high wage economy in comparison with our own.

In the 1980s we drifted from surplus to break even and on to the stage where we now have a serious trade deficit, principally with the EEC. If we consider the way in which our industry has changed since the 1970s, we may learn how to conquer the problems of the 1990s. In 1973, nine companies produced television sets—seven of them were British. The production and design of a television set requires, at best, medium grade technology; it is not the world's most difficult task. Nevertheless, since 1973, all the British companies have gone. Now 11 companies manufacture televisions in Britain and nine of those companies originate from east Asia, principally Japan. In the same period the share of world trade held by eastern Asia has increased from 10 per cent. to 20 per cent.

Technology, even that required to make televisions, is a world growth industry whether it is applied to the environment, transportation, health or Government standards. Although our industries improved during the 1970s and 1980s, they have not kept up with the rest of the world competitively. There must be discussions between Government and industry about how our joint resources can improve our export competitiveness, but that must be done without bearing down on industry or intervening in its strategy.

Nowadays, far too few of our people are coming forward to train as scientists and engineers. The latest information reveals that a quarter of the engineering course opportunities have not been taken up in this academic year. In 1960, we had as many qualified engineers as the Japanese, 250,000. By 1992, the number of our graduate engineers will have doubled, which is commendable until one discovers that, in Japan, that number will have increased seven times over.

One cannot ignore the tremendous drive for quality and for research that is now sweeping, almost like a plague, through most of the east Asian countries. The CBI recently pointed out that skill shortages are becoming a major constraint on output. In 1980 only 3 per cent. of the companies polled said that they faced problems because of skill shortages, but in 1987 that number had grown to 15 per cent. and it is still increasing. We need world quality scientists and engineers to increase our competitiveness, but we are not producing them at the necessary rate.

After 1992, the United Kingdom, as part of the EEC, will face an enormous battle. Presently the export deficit between the EEC and Japan stands at about $18 billion a year. By 1992 that deficit is forecast to rise to $38 billion. That is the deficit with Japan alone, but in 1992 our deficit with the other newly industrialised nations of east Asia will be well in excess of $20 billion.

I hope that I have identified the enormous task that lies before the Government and the European Economic Community. I am not an interventionist, but surely everyone can see that, although the Government may wish to be non-interventionist, they are entwined in the industrial fabric and future of our nation. I ask Ministers to heed that fact and recognise the Government's essential role as an entrepreneur and partner in the progress of our trade and industry.

5.59 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): My hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) described the Queen's Speech as one of "missed opportunities." That is particularly true with regard to environmental issues, and the Secretary of State's speech perhaps explained why.

The Queen's Speech reads:

> "My Government will continue to attach very great importance to protecting our environment, both nationally and internationally."

I stress the word "continue" because, as progress and action on that front have so far been extremely laggardly, this is not a particularly encouraging commitment from the Government. The attempt to suggest that the privatisation of water and electricity is specifically designed to achieve environmental benefits would be laughable if it were not such a serious matter.

The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) gave what I can only describe as an excuse rather than a justification for the privatisation of water. It was unfortunate and regrettable that he chose to smear the environmental lobby as some kind of Communist fellow travellers. If that is to be the stuff of leadership from the Conservative party in the future, then it will be the kind of rhetoric that we hear from one-party state dictators rather than from people who are prepared to engage in democratic debate.

The privatisation measures have been in progress for several years, but not once, until the Prime Minister shocked her colleagues with her sudden announcement that she had been converted to concern on green issues, have we been told that they were being brought forward for environmental benefits and that, apparently, that is now the prime reason for the exercise. Ministers must think that the British public are green in the old-fashioned sense if they think that we will swallow that one.

In the days following the Prime Minister's unheralded change of heart, those of us who watched news broadcasts could see that her Environment Ministers were rushing around like headless chickens trying to convince themselves, let alone the public, that they were taking action on the environment and that they had anything in the cupboard that could be portrayed as positive action. They knew full well that, hitherto, their job was to slow down, delay, obstruct and resist in any way possible measures being proposed by others in the United Kingdom and the European Community and internationally to deal with environmental problems. Suddenly, they were putting a green gloss on everything, trying to kid a gullible public that real action was taking place when, in reality, nothing had changed.

The Government will find it hard to get away with that for long because those people who are genuinely concerned about the environment have given the matter a great deal of thought over a long period and know that getting to grips with the environment requires fundamental and philosophical changes. In short, positive action on green issues is incompatible with Thatcherism, and the Prime Minister must confront that problem.

The privatisation measures are included in the Queen's Speech simply for ideological reasons. The Government are as ideological as any Marxist or Socialist regime. The rhetoric from the Tories that now refers to the discipline of the market place and the stimulus of commercial pressure is hollow because the mechanisms for bringing those pressures to bear in respect of basic commodities, such as power and water, simply do not exist. There is no serious suggestion that consumers will have a choice of where they get their water or electricity supplies. In practice, they will deal with a monopoly supplier, no longer one whose prime concern is public service, but one whose prime interest is profit.

Costs will rise. That is admitted, even by the Government, and it is undeniable. Even before the transfer takes place, the enterprises will be fattened up at the taxpayer's expense and charges for water and electricity will be jacked up.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): Is it not true that the privatisation measures for water in particular are breaking the Government's philosophy, as they are not creating competition but are transferring public monopolies to private monopolies, and that the only way that they will achieve profitability is by milking the consumers who will pay for the privatisation? Does my hon. Friend also agree that the Secretary of State for the Environment excelled himself last week when he said in even more flowery language than he used today that he would float the 10 private water companies after privatisation?

Mr. Bruce: My hon. Friend is anticipating what I was about to say. He is right because the Government's excuse for jacking up prices in advance of privatisation is to secure revenue for investment. Perhaps Ministers can tell us what other enterprise could increase prices to its customers to finance future investment. Surely the essence of risk taking is that the shareholders and the City institutions put up the risk capital in the belief that the market will sustain a sufficient return to make it worthwhile.

However, the Government are turning all that on its head. The investors are being given cast-iron guarantees of assured profits for no risk. That is immoral and it turns the public, as consumers of essential utilities, into captive milch cows for international capital. That is the exact opposite of what an enterprise culture is supposed to be about.

It is important to record that the electricity supply industry has been built up as a great enterprise in the public sector. The national grid and its operation is a magnificent achievement, and no one can deny that. Certainly there is room for restructuring. The relationship between the generation and distribution sides can certainly be changed and the dictatorial power of Lord Marshall should be curtailed, but that is no case for privatisation. If the Government's rhetoric were being followed through, all forms of electricity generation would be put on an even footing so that the market could operate. In reality, for strategic reasons, nuclear power has enjoyed massive subsidy and protection, and it will continue to do so.

In the United States, where nuclear power has to take its chance commercially, the industry is dead. No one is prepared to finance new nuclear power stations. Indeed, in the United States, no one is financing any new power stations. Yet the British Government are proposing to force the industry to continue to buy in nuclear power for almost 20 per cent. of the total rather than make its own decisions simply on commercial factors.

However, not even that is sufficient for the Government. They are pledging an open blank cheque from the taxpayer to cover all risks associated with the industry, nuclear waste disposal and insurance against

[Mr. Bruce]

accidents. In other words, the taxpayer takes all the risks and the investor secure all the profit. No Socialist Government would have ever dared to try such effrontery.

The position is even worse because there is no doubt that, even on the basis of existing technology, using energy more efficiently and backing viable alternative forms of generation could more than replace all the electricity that we obtain from nuclear power and do so within less than a decade. That is a technical and economic fact that the Government refuse to accept.

Pursuing such a course is the one measure that would do most to reduce the pressure of the greenhouse effect and all other forms of air pollution related to the generation of electricity. We should, at the same time, become full members of the 30 per cent. club. The Secretary of State may boast, but Britain is doing less later than any other country, and no one believes that that is something to be proud of. The Secretary of State is proud of the fact that he will host an international conference on the threat to the ozone layer. That could rebound on him if we have not taken steps to phase out CFCs by the time it takes place.

Research and development of renewable energy sources has not only been starved of resources, but has been under the control of the nuclear lobby which has a vested interest in showing that they cannot work. Why else was the wave research programme curtailed just when it was about to become commercially viable? Why have we not made positive progress on a commercial tidal barrage?

We pioneered the development of modern wind power turbines, so why is it that the development has proceeded faster and on a greater scale in California, Denmark, Sweden and Greece? I suggest that wind power is one of the technologies that can create jobs and use traditional skills, especially in some of the older industrial areas. Unfortunately, the rules are heavily stacked against these technologies. For example, wind turbines are rated more highly than conventional units of generation—1·8p per kilowatt of installed capacity as against 1·7p for conventional power stations. Electricity boards will not pay a competitive price for surplus electricity from wind turbines.

The firm of James Howden of Glasgow is just outside the constituency of Govan. It is a pioneer of wind turbines. It is looking forward to building one of the Department of Energy's sponsored wind farms. It will be interesting to be given details of when these projects will go ahead. We await the presentation of a timetable. Representatives of James Howden have told me of the business that the firm could secure from wind farms, coupled with a change in the rating and a simple amendment to energy legislation. It estimates that it could create no fewer than 700 jobs in Glasgow and Renfrew within 12 months. That practical action will follow only if the Government do things instead of talking about them.

How do the Government propose to control the movement of shares after the privatisation of the electricity industry? The Secretary of State for Scotland has given assurances that the separate concerns that he is selling in Scotland will continue to be Scottish and Scottish controlled. How can that be achieved? With the phasing out of the social clause that relates to the hydro-electric board, how can we ensure that remote and rural communities will not lose out in future? These questions must be answered. How can the Government present their rhetoric about the privatisation of English and Welsh water and expect us to believe that they do not have a timetable for Scottish water? Let us have a clear statement of when they propose to privatise Scottish water or a clear assurance that they have no intention of privatising it because the way that the water industry is organised in Scotland is the model that England and Wales should follow.

It is interesting that the White Paper on the Scottish electricity industry contains assertions about the benefits of keeping the Scottish boards autonomous. One passage states:

> "The Government . . . wishes to provide competitive pressures within the industry in Scotland . . . and considers that the proposal to privatise two companies will achieve this to a significant degree."

I wonder why such an "excellent" argument in that context was not applied to Scottish gas, Scottish telecommunications or the Scottish steel industry? The Government seem to have adopted a selective use of argument.

The Government have created growing concern about their intentions for the future of economic development in Scotland. *Scotland on Sunday* leaked a proposal about the dismantling of the Scottish Development Agency, which the Government denied. They have only themselves to blame, however, for the mess in which they find themselves over that issue. I advise the Government that quite a good motto is, "If it's not broke, don't fix it." The work of the Highlands and Islands Development Board and the SDA has been widely praised, and to dismantle them in favour of regional enterprise boards that would be run by local business men would be the height of folly. The best business men are running their businesses. If they take over the enterprise initiative, who will man the shop? Much more sensible would be a partnership between the SDA, the HIDB, existing enterprise trusts, Scottish Business in the Community and local authorities. We should move forward in that way.

Mr. Favell: I shall be pleased to give the hon. Gentleman the benefit of my experience. In Stockport, there is an excellent local enterprise agency. It is run by local business men. Stockport is a northern industrial town and unemployment is now less than 6 per cent.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I can say exactly the same about the enterprise board in my city of Aberdeen. I am pleased to say that it makes an important contribution to the community. I am not criticising enterprise boards, but it is important to ensure that they fit properly into the scheme of things. They cannot take overall responsibility for local development, which is what the Government suggest. Business men are busy running their own businesses and there is a shortage of business men to advise the queue of those who wish to start new businesses. I make no criticism of the enterprise trust movement. On the contrary, I think that it is excellent. I merely say that it is not the complete answer that the Government seem to think it is.

There is a long list of actions that the Government will have to take before they will convince me and others that their present green tinge is anything other than cosmetic. I think that hon. Members have all received copies of the *Green Gauntlet*, which sets out practical measures that the Government could implement with existing technology. The House will be interested to know whether there will be a constructive response by the Government. It is worth mentioning a few of the problems with which we must deal.

According to a United Nations economic commission for Europe, by 1993 Britain will be polluting the skies with as much sulphur dioxide as France, West Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands put together. That is the status that we have achieved. Water authority pollution incidents increased by 9·5 per cent. in England and Wales in 1987. Agriculture pollution in Scotland has increased by 49 per cent. Britain still dumps sewage sludge around its coastline. The amount of hazardous waste has increased from 53,000 tonnes to 81,400 tonnes between 1981 and 1986. We have the greatest output of noxious fumes of any country within the Community, yet we are still lagging behind other European countries in introducing unleaded petrol. Only one in nine garages in the United Kingdom sells it compared with 98 per cent. in West Germany. It may be a niggling point, but it would be impressive if the Prime Minister were to use a Jaguar that had been converted to use unleaded petrol, as it would have to be if it were sold in the United States.

There has been an investment of £24 million on wind research, £4 million on solar research, £1·9 million on tidal research and £935·6 million on nuclear energy. That imbalance will have to be redressed. If the Government are sure that they have their energy policy right, why are they cutting the budget for the Energy Efficiency Office? We should be jacking it up considerably if we are to turn round our energy policy.

Opposition Members need attach no credibility to the Government's stated position on environmental concern until they produce measures that are not cosmetic and advance arguments that are not twisted. They must respond to the facts that have been placed before them. As and when they take appropriate measures, they will be entitled to claim that they have confronted the problems of the environment. As yet, they have a long way to go.

6.17 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Since we debated the previous Gracious Speech the agony of the Ulster people has continued unabated. The IRA campaign of violence has claimed more victims, broken more homes and left more widows and orphans. That is the harsh reality of the situation in Northern Ireland. Far from being eradicated and eliminated, IRA terrorism is on the increase. Recently Sir Jack Hermon, the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, warned us that the IRA is now better equipped than ever before and that Ulster must brace itself for an horrific end to the year.

Ninety-two people have died already this year as a result of terrorism in the Province. That must be compared with the total of 54 who died as a result of terrorism throughout 1985. It is clear that the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement has not brought the peace, reconciliation and stability which was promised. It has led instead to more deaths in the Province, greater instability and greater polarisation between the communities.

Some of the events of last week were not reported in the national press. At the beginning of the week, a 600 lb bomb was placed just outside the Army base in North Howard street. When it exploded, it injured eight or nine soldiers and caused tremendous damage to the base. It caused severe damage to many houses. Many people, both elderly and young, along with their families, were badly shaken by the explosion. No warning was given. It was only by the mercy of Almighty God that there were not many more injuries or even deaths. How is it that the IRA is able to place such a massive device on the perimeter of a major Army base in west Belfast? Among those who died was an RUC reserve constable, William Monteith, of Castlederg. He was murdered.

Tuesday witnessed a murder attempt on an RUC constable carrying out his duties in connection with the Royal visit. Also on Tuesday there was an IRA rocket attack on an RUC patrol at Castlewellan and an attack on the police headquarters in Strand road in Londonderry. On Wednesday there was an horrific IRA attack at Benburb on an unmanned police station which resulted in the deaths of Emma Donnelly and Barney Lavery, a grandfather and granddaughter who happened to be in a car in the vicinity when the bomb exploded. Eight people were injured, including a 78-year-old woman. On Thursday night a man was shot dead near Coagh, in county Tyrone.

That is the sad chronicle of what happened last week in Northern Ireland. At the beginning of last week the Chief Constable announced that he had to close the following police stations because of cuts: Achalee, Dromara, Waringstown, Annalong, Strangford, Greyabbey, and smaller posts at Larne, Carrickfergus, Greenisland and two in my constituency of Ballymena. The closing of the police stations is a terrible thing.

The Chief Constable discriminated against women police officers who took him to the local tribunal and won their cases to the tune of more than £1 million. Is it not a fact that money must be found from this year's budget and as a result we will have less security in Northern Ireland as the situation deteriorates? The Government should tell us whether that is the case. The stupidity of the chief of police to take on the womenfolk in his own force and to try to discriminate against them has caused the problem. When he was taken to the local tribunal it was found that he was acting out of order. I salute the womenfolk. They had every right to be employed. Why must the people of Northern Ireland suffer because of the Chief Constable's actions? The expenditure on security in Northern Ireland should not be taken from the Ulster budget but should be funded directly from the Treasury.

I want briefly to welcome other aspects of the Government's policy on security. There is a feeling in Northern Ireland that some of the Government's policies do not go far enough. However, we welcome the fact that the Government are taking the proper course. What disappoints us and causes us sorrow is the fact that the Social Democratic and Labour party has come out strongly against all the proposals. It has said that the proposals will not help and as a result the IRA can continue its insidious campaign. By encouraging that the SDLP has become a party to it.

The tragedy of the proposed oath against terrorism is that it is fatally flawed at the outset. That rule will not be enforced by the Attorney-General or the Law Officers of the Crown. Individuals will have to take it on their own personal responsibility. In the regions where councils would be affected by such a proposal the majority of the councils would favour Sinn Fein councillors. As a result, they will not take any action. However, if a councillor took action and a Sinn Fein or IRA member of the council was

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

disqualified and lost his seat, it is easy to see what would happen in Northern Ireland. The person who made the complaint and carried it through the courts would find himself in a coffin. That would be the end of the law.

The oath will be effective only if the Law Officers of the Crown are prepared to take on the responsibility. It is interesting to note that Mr. Adams said that he would not take his seat in Westminster because he would have to take an oath of allegiance to Her Majesty the Queen, but he would go ahead and take the oath of terrorism if elected to a council seat.

Belfast city council made representations to the effect that the oath of allegiance to the Queen should be restored —Sinn Fein members have said that they will not take that oath. That would deal with the situation far more effectively than the present proposal. The Government must face up to proscribing Sinn Fein and not tinker around with this matter.

The Government have placed great stress on extradition between Northern Ireland and the south and between the south of Ireland and this country. Anyone who has had his ear to the ground in the past few days will notice with concern what is happening in the case of Father Patrick Ryan. It has been said that the Attorney-General in the south of Ireland is deeply anxious because the feeling is that there is no justice in English courts. That accusation has been made against Ulster courts, and it is made continually against the judiciary of Northern Ireland. However, as the extradition in this case is not from the south to the north, but from the south to this part of the United Kingdom, the same argument is put forward. People in Northern Ireland will be looking carefully at this case because it illustrates the ineffectuality of the present arrangements under the much vaunted Anglo-Irish Agreement.

As I promised to be brief, I will finish by paying my tribute to the hospital services in Northern Ireland, and especially to the nurses. Ministers have said that justice has been done to the nursing profession. I do not agree with that. The nurses in Northern Ireland, as well as their counterparts in this part of the United Kingdom, have been badly treated in many instances. The nurses in my area told me that they have been asked to appeal but that they would hear the results of their appeal in three years' time. That is not justice for the nursing profession. The nurses in Northern Ireland deserve the full-hearted support of their public representatives, and they will have it in their battle for justice.

6.27 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Today's debate is centred on two specific themes—industry and the environment. I want, first, to consider industry, because industry involves the creation of wealth and provides jobs. It is therefore vital to the nation. On many occasions over the past few years I have criticised the Government for their lack of concern about the importance of manufacturing industry to the future of this nation.

The figures have shown that we have been trading continuously in deficit in manufacturing industry, but the Government have said repeatedly that we must consider the picture as a whole and consider tourism and invisibles. I do not dispute that, but at the end of the day manufacturing industry is a basic requirement of this nation. The Government must be worried about the trade deficit figures of £2·43 billion and the manufacturing deficit of almost £3 billion announced last week.

While I accept that the figures may improve next month and that one or two factors may have affected the figures that were published last Friday, to call the figures a slight freak, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer did on Friday on television, is grossly to underestimate the situation. The underlying trend of the past few months has shown that our trade balance is increasingly worsening. It was announced on Friday that interest rates were rising yet again, to 13 per cent. Inflation is running at 6·4 per cent. and rising.

Since 1979 the Government have said repeatedly that we must accept unemployment, cuts in public expenditure and many other things that are unacceptable to Opposition Members because it is important to control the economy. Although the Government have managed to con the people that they are controlling the economy, it is becoming increasingly apparent that they are failing to do so. No doubt when the people recognise their failure in that regard they will recognise their many other failures.

If we are to export more manufactured goods than we import, we must recognise the problems posed by the high value of the pound and the tremendous burden imposed by increased interest rates, which will make it even more difficult for manufacturing industry to win the world's markets. Since 1979 public investment has fallen by 40 per cent., and the outline of the Government's expenditure programmes shows that it will fall by a further 6 per cent. in the next three years. The Queen's Speech mentions the Government's intention to make further cuts. Some of the cuts are occurring in the environment: spending on the water industry reached a peak in 1974, and in constant terms we are now spending only about two thirds as much as we were then on dealing with the industry's massive problems. That is an appalling indictment of the Government.

Manufacturing industry is particularly important to my part of the country, the north-west. The Government claim that investment in manufacturing industry is just above the 1979 figure, but in the north-west it is 38 per cent. below that figure in constant terms. The north-west is heavily dependent on manufacturing jobs, but they have declined by 38 per cent.—coincidentally the same figure, but in fact the two are linked. Until the Government right the position, unemployment and the balance of trade will continue to present problems.

We want a Government committed to ensuring that the regions can benefit from the Channel tunnel. We need rail and road links to bypass London so that we can get our goods into Europe speedily and efficiently and our people can travel there in the same way. We also want our regional airports developed and are hoping for an announcement this week that Manchester airport will be allowed to spend £500 million on a second terminal. We do not want the airport privatised. After years of development it is a successful airport, developed first by the city of Manchester, later by the county council and then by the consortium of local authorities that has run it since the council's abolition. We believe that that success can continue in the public sector, and we want a rail link to the airport as soon as possible.

The Secretary of State said that he believed the privatisation of water was the Government's greatest environmental move. The right hon. Gentleman is sadly mistaken. If given the right powers, the money and the staff to do its job, the National Rivers Authority could be a move in the right direction, but the industry need not be privatised for that objective to be achieved. If given powers to borrow on the commercial market, it could do so. If the Government did not limit them, by financial constraints, to passing on costs to consumers, water authorities could work effectively in the public sector, attacking the problems of pollution in our rivers and estuaries and ensuring our water quality.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn) *rose*——

Mr. Pike: I do not want to give way, because I am anxious for many hon. Members to speak in the debate.

The North-West water authority has the biggest problems of any water authority in the country, with the Mersey basin and the old mains and sewer pipes which owe their existence to the industrial revolution. Much money needs to be spent. We are also fearful of what may happen to our heritage and our valuable land holdings in the Lake and Peak districts and other parts of the north-west as a result of privatisation.

We are told that we are to have another Housing Bill. I wish that the Government would try to treat those wishing to rent properties in the same way as those who wish to purchase. Ever since 1979 they have been subsidised completely differently. Almost all local authorities have lost Government subsidy from their housing revenue accounts, which has forced up rent levels. We are now told that authorities themselves will not be able to subsidise. That will again mean substantial rent increases in many areas, penalising many people. The Government will say that those qualified for housing benefit will get it back, but other tenants will end up paying for the subsidy, and that is a dangerous way to proceed.

The person who will receive help is someone buying a house, receiving a large income and paying 40 per cent. tax and wanting a mortgage. It is quite different for someone who rents a property and will no longer receive housing benefit. Moreover, almost every local authority has had to cut back on its housing programme, which has affected the provision of sheltered housing, the improvement of stock and the building of new stock.

The Secretary of State said that the housing condition survey, published today, showed that there had been an improvement between 1981 and 1986. He has had the advantage of seeing the report, which Opposition Members have not. If the report shows such an improvement, it is unique, for every other report—political, Church or even with royal patronage—has criticised the present state of housing stock.

The Government say that they intend to do something about housing grants. I support any move that ensures value for money; at present many bad improvement jobs are done by cowboy builders and more checks would be welcome. We shall, however, look closely at the Government's proposals. The grants reached a peak in the free-for-all just before the 1983 election. There were cuts immediately after it.

In some parts of the country the cost of improving a house is not covered by the value of that house after it has been improved. My constituency in north-east Lancashire is a good example. A person can spend £10,000 or £11,000 on improving a house, but he will be lucky, depending on the area in which he lives, if he can sell the house for £10,000. We must know how the emphasis is to be changed and what assistance the Government intend to give.

There is a deterioration in the housing stock, whether it be in the public or the private sector. The Government must do something positive about it. The Housing Bill that the Government introduced in the last Session did nothing to tackle the housing problems. I fear that the new Bill will not tackle them, either.

Sufficient resources should be made available so that adequate sheltered housing can be provided for all elderly people who need it. Central Government, local government and housing associations must meet the growing need. The Government have announced that they intend to introduce another Local Government Bill. Since 1979 the Government have said that they believe in the freedom of local government and that they will set the town halls free, but they have curtailed the freedom of local authorities; for example, by limiting their financial powers to meet the needs of the communities that they have been elected to serve.

I fear that the new Bill will be another move in that direction. The Secretary of State and many Conservative Members do not believe in local government, but many of their Conservative colleagues on local authorities share my concern. Conservative councillors, and councillors of other parties, agree with Labour councillors that elected local authorities ought to be able to implement programmes that meet the needs of their communities.

The football Bill will do nothing to solve the problem. It is a mistake to call it a football problem. Even when there is no football match, or football team, one can go into certain town centres on a Saturday and be met by hooliganism and violence. People are thrown into fountains, and there are many other similar incidents. Do the Government intend to introduce identity cards for people who go shopping? That is the direction in which they are going.

I was amazed to hear the Minister with responsibility for sport say on television yesterday that if a card was rejected the person would be dealt with when he had passed through the barrier. What nonsense. Anybody who possesses a credit card knows how often the card fails to go through the wipe-through machines when paying for petrol or other goods. The scheme will not solve the problem at football grounds. It will create more problems. It is a move in the wrong direction. The Government need to think again.

6.43 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): In a debate on the Loyal Address, as in any other debate, it is nice to be able to speak about general principles. It is also nice to deal with general principles that concern one's own constituents. I want to deal with a narrow planning subject—the preservation of the environment in north-west London and in suburbia throughout the country.

I regret the fact that the Gracious Speech contains no proposals to prevent the excessive building in suburbia that is taking place now. There was a meeting recently of north-west London Conservative Members of Parliament. I did not call that meeting, but I was asked to go to it. I realised then that my concern is shared by many other Members of Parliament with suburban constituencies.

[Sir Rhodes Boyson]

There are between 70 and 80 constituencies outside the inner cities and towns that were developed in the 1930s, the 1950s and the 1960s. In the 1930s, those suburbs were the precursors of Thatcherism. Under the Conservative Government of the 1930s there was considerable economic expansion. The rising living standards that followed the economic expansion of the 1930s led to houses being built outside the inner cities and towns, in the then green belt that we now call suburbia. Germany and the United Kingdom advanced more economically in the 1930s than any of the other major countries of the world.

Suburbs also grew up in the 1950s but the great change came in the 1960s. People went to live in suburbia because they knew that their houses would have good-sized gardens, where their children could play on grass. Playing fields were provided. The quality of life in suburbia was much higher than in the towns and cities from which they had come. In the 1930s, families could buy houses in suburbia relatively cheaply. Similarly, compared with the position now, houses in the 1950s and 1960s were relatively cheap. The attraction for people to move into suburbia was the quality of life—the green gardens, the playing fields and the good schools.

Before I am accused of becoming a collectivist, or it is said that I may be intending to cross the Floor of the House, may I make it perfectly clear that I am a free-marketeer Conservative, as I have always been. I am quite happy that there should be no planning laws. I should be prepared to get rid of the lot and see what happened. I object to planning laws that go against the interests of my constituents and those of other Members of Parliament. The job of a Member of Parliament is to look after his constituents and to ensure that the law does not act against their interests, as the planning laws certainly do in suburbia.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way, and also for the work that we have jointly done in north-west London on this matter. Does he not agree that increasingly we have come to realise that the planning legislation is excessively weighted in favour of the developer and against the interests of local residents?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I agree with my hon. Friend and I shall turn to that point in a few moments.

Mr. Favell: Does my right hon. Friend also agree that the planning legislation is heavily weighted in favour of those who live in privileged circumstances in the open country and against those my right hon. Friend represents in suburbia and those I represent in my own constituency? They say that every available piece of green land should be built on before their view is obscured.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I promise not to give way again, Mr. Speaker. If I am successful in the ballot for private Members' Bills, I know that I shall have my hon. Friend's support. He will certainly be involved at that stage.

So-called enlightened views—liberal views, in American political terms—have favoured the green belt. The green belt is sacred in some quarters and the inner cities are attractive in others, but nobody is concerned about the 10 million people, of all political opinions, at all levels of society, who live in suburbia. Houses are being pulled down and playing fields are being built over. That good environment is being destroyed.

I wondered whether this was my personal opinion, but then I found that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) is of the same opinion. We are not on the same side of the party, which demonstrates our breadth of vision. Only two weeks ago the Institute of Economic Affairs, which cannot be attacked for its Left-wing views, published a paper "No Room! No Room!". It was written by Alan Evans, professor of environmental economics at Reading university. He said:

> "Accessible open space, the space where most people live, primarily garden space, is developed and built over in order to preserve inaccessible open space, land in rural areas which few can visit because the land so preserved is almost invariably private. This environmental swap—the maintenance of the rural environment at the expense of the urban environment—is mostly unrecognised. But is especially ironic when the economic pressure for re-development to higher densities affects urban conservation areas, so that, in effect, an urban conservation area is destroyed (because 'one cannot stand in the way of progress') in order to preserve the rural environment (where, apparently, one can).
>
> Moreover, this reduction in the quality of the urban environment affects all the inhabitants of the urban area. So although owner-occupiers may make capital gains from the increase in the value of their housing, they are made worse off through the reduction in the quality of their immediate physical environment. The only unequivocal gainers are those, not unknown amongst the aristocracy of England, who live in a preserved rural area and own property in urban areas."

I quote that so that the Opposition know that this is also a cross-party speech.

Since 1960, tens of thousands of good homes have been knocked down in suburbia. Some were built after the second world war, when the nation invested in houses with gardens where children could be brought up easily. They are being replaced by blocks of small flats. Houses with gardens are then overlooked by flats, the residents flee elsewhere and whole areas are destroyed. We could have a new inner city in the destruction of what was once a green environment. The green belt I want is gardens and playing fields in surburban areas, which should be preserved to enable all in those areas to enjoy a good quality of life.

I want to suggest a change in planning legislation for the next Queen's Speech—I am sorry that it was not in the Queen's Speech this year. First, no house should be knocked down without planning permission. At present, houses are knocked down and something else is allowed to be built in their place because the council does not want the site to be left empty. Secondly, it should be possible for the householders of the area to appeal against planning permission granted by the council. At present a developer can appeal if planning permission is refused, but if planning permission is granted by the council—whether because of the rateable value of the proposed development or because of vindictiveness against the people of the area whose environment is being destroyed—there can be no appeal. That goes against natural justice. The man who is making a quick buck can appeal, but the local people whose lifestyle will be destroyed have no appeal.

Thirdly, planning permission should be applied for only by applicants who own the land concerned. When I was first elected, somebody applied for planning permission to knock down 700 houses in my constituency. There was panic in the area. The old widow, for example, who had lived in the area since the 1930s was worried. People may say that she should have sold her house and left the area, but it was her quality of life that was being affected and her family, including her grandchildren, could not stay twice a year with her. Those visits are the life boats of her life. Man does not live by bread alone, and those visits kept her going. But many people sold their homes in panic. I may be a Tory romantic, but I am in good company in my views on this issue.

Fourthly, I wish to comment on the calling in of planning applications. I realise the difficulty of the decisions that have to be made by the Department on which of the major applications to call in. In the past three years, three major planning applications in my constituency have been called in and the Minister has agreed in each case that the green belt of playing fields and green areas should not be destroyed. The important point was that those applications were called in and the matter was referred to the Department. There is no clear line on which to make those decisions. Although it is easy for hon. Members to decide what is of national importance in their own constituencies, the Department deals with many applications. I have great respect for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. I know how difficult it must be to make those decisions and it would help him to have a system for deciding which applications should be called in. I should no longer need to write letters about planning applications.

I shall give one example from my constituency. A big superstore was to be built which would have brought traffic on a road to a stop. Everyone in the area was opposed to it, but the council gave permission. The application was called in by the Department. An inquiry was held and the inspector, who was wise and good, took evidence and advised Ministers, who were also wise and good, saying that the development should not be built. However, three years later the same firm put in an application to build a bigger superstore in the same place. That application was not called in.

How was the application of national importance then but not now? I realise that there may have been differences between the two applications, but there must be a better system for calling in. Residents in my constituency will consider it to be against natural justice that one planning application was turned down by the Department whereas a larger development on the same site is allowed. We may have to ask for a judicial review of that case.

The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike)—the hon. Gentleman represents an area that I know well—said that he believed in local government. So do I. I do not like power to be centralised. A centralised state is almost as bad as a Socialist state. There is much wisdom outside Government—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—which is why we have privatised several industries. I cannot let the Opposition cheer without explaining myself, or I shall be deselected. It is important that there should be a balance of power between central Government and local councils; it is part of the freedom of our society. If one section is in total charge, freedom will die.

We should have smaller councils. I opposed the reorganisation of local government in 1964, which was a disaster. Big tower blocks were built, big comprehensive schools were set up and size was everything. That policy has proved to be a disaster. The creation of Brent was typical. It was opposed by Willesden and Wembley, yet it was pushed through. The Boundary Commission should look again at the disaster area of Brent for the sake of both sides of the borough. That would have the backing of other hon. Members in the area. It should be split into areas where people know their councillors. They should vote not for a particular party, but for the person who will do the best job for them. As Lord Woolton said, local government should be government and should be local. The big local authority areas have brought about full-time local politicians, the politicisation of local government and other developments that are deplored by hon. Members from all parties.

If we continue to allow the green gardens and playing fields of suburbia to be destroyed, I foresee a future in which millions of acres of the green belt are preserved for the privileged and for American, European and even Asiatic tourists, whereas the residents of what was once green suburbia will have to drive out into the countryside at weekends along traffic-jammed roads to see what shrubs and trees look like and for their children to play on grass. We shall no longer have horticultural societies—we shall have window-box societies. Window-box prizes are already being given in my area. Present planners will then be attacked, just as we attack those who allowed the building of the tower blocks. That was considered to be enlightened at the time, but everyone now asks why it was allowed.

We have done so much damage to suburbia that people there are already appalled. People will say in the future, as they say now, "Why was it allowed?" Everybody from the working class and middle class upwards moved to suburbia, to the green belt, so that they could have gardens and playing fields for their children. To see all that destroyed now will be as disastrous as the tower blocks that have been built.

I am making a cross-party not a political speech. To return to what I said at the beginning, I am a free marketeeer. I say that to clarify the position for any Opposition Member who might temporarily agree with me and to ensure my reselection at the right time. I would prefer a free market that is allowed to sort itself out. Some of the best streets in London—or anywhere—with their big houses were built in a free market, as indeed were the good working-class houses in the north in, for example, Burnley and Haslingden. I would prefer such a free market society. However, if we are to have planning, let us be sure about what we are doing. We should not preserve the green belt areas only to destroy the areas of the little green belts of gardens where tens of thousands, if not millions, of our people live, because if we do that we will destroy the environment for the children.

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that until 9 o'clock we are in the 10-minute limit period.

7 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I am pleased that you have reminded me of the 10-minute limit, Mr. Speaker. It is good to follow the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) because we have clashed on many occasions in Committee and have agreed to disagree. However, at least I can say that he has always explained why he has disagreed with me—and that is refreshing.

One thing that the right hon. Gentleman and I do agree on is that local government should remain local. I agree that our problems with local government began in 1964 because if we had not had the 1964 reorganisation we

[Mr. Allen McKay]

would not have had our problems in local government. Unfortunately, this Government's policies will destroy local government. It was a sad reflection of that fact that when I was speaking to local councillors this week they questioned whether it was worth being a councillor any more. It is serious when people who have spent a life time in local government question doing so any longer. However, they are right to view local government with trepidation when they read of the legislation in the Queen's Speech. It looks as if central Government is attacking not only the finances but the workings of local government. That attitude will create many problems at a local level.

The Queen's Speech states:

> "A Bill will be brought forward to reform the law on local government capital and housing finance, on home improvement grants".

In his Budget the Chancellor of the Exchequer decided to alter the system of rebates or grants for renovating houses. In my area and in many of the areas represented by my hon. Friends there are many pre-reinforced concrete houses; many previously belonging to the National Coal Board, or British Coal as it now is, have been passed over to the local authorities and some belong to the local authorities themselves. Altering the system of grants alters the system under which a person can buy his house from the local authority if that is what he wants to do because he may be buying a house that he cannot put on the open market. It may also alter the system whereby a person can get an improvement grant if the house belongs to British Coal and pay for the improvements in that way——

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is hypocritical of the Government to proceed with the privatisation of the energy supply industry at a time when Ministers are giving assurances that former NCB houses will not be up for tender or auction without first being offered to local authorities or proper housing associations? Is my hon. Friend aware that 168 houses in Nottinghamshire have been put up for tender without going through that process, despite the assurances that were given?

Mr. McKay: It is regrettable, but my hon. Friend is right. I thought that there was an understanding on a formula to be adopted before reaching the final stage of putting the houses on the open market. If British Coal has decided to go another way, it is regrettable. I have had similar instances in my constituency and know of the problems of the tenants of such houses.

I turn now to homelessness. It will be very regrettable if we change the definition of homelessness to rooflessness. There are rumours about the involvement of private institutions. It will be regrettable if a person who is already down and homeless is subjected to that. I hope that the Government will not go that way.

I refer now to an issue that has already been referred to today—nurses' pay and the National Health Service. Whoever advised the Secretary of State for Health to give a wage increase at the same time as undertaking a regrading exercise should be sacked. If the Secretary of State knew about that and went along with it, it is time that he looked about as well. It is fundamental to any industrial relations policy that one should never give a wage increase at the same time as undertaking a reorganisation or regrading. The regrading should be carried out either before the increase is given or about three years later. It is known to be a disaster if both are given together, but that is what has happened. Somebody must have worked really hard to be able to put £2 billion forward as a wage increase for nurses only to have them then go on strike. The Secretary of State should look carefully at what has happened.

I should now like to ask a number of pertinent questions about the privatisation of electricity. We know that the electricity industry will be organised into three blocks: big G, little G or whatever, and the redistribution board. It is a fact that out of our five advanced gas-cooled reactors three are not working. Millions of pounds of taxpayers' money is being poured into trying to get those stations working before privatisation. The Secretary of State for Energy is always reminding us of the fact that it is taxpayers' money.

The Magnox power stations will be taken out of use in between five and 10 years time—10 years at the most. Therefore, we have 10 Magnox power stations that will be out of use within 10 years, three AGRs that are not working, two pressurised water reactors that are working and four PWRs are required at a cost of £6 billion. No one will buy shares in an industry that will have to fork out £6 billion for four power stations, no one will buy shares in an industry that has three AGRs that will need to be written off and no one will buy shares in an industry that will have to pick up a £3 billion bill for getting rid of nuclear waste. Either the Government can ringfence the nuclear industry and take the cost of nuclear generation out of electricity charges and pay for it themselves—if they do that the taxpayers will be paying for it—or the cost will be borne by electricity consumers. The Government should tell us exactly what they intend doing and tell the future shareholders what will be required of them.

It is wrong for the Government to privatise the water industry. We want to know about the land that belongs to the water authorities now. We should not forget that the water authorities belonged to local government at one time and that local government has never been recompensed for the water authorities being nationalised. We should certainly look for recompense now that the water authorities are to be privatised.

What will happen to all the land? Will it be dealt with differently? Will there be protection for the people who use the land for recreational purposes? Will the waterways, which are also used for recreation, be protected? Will we be able to use the pathways that cross the land just as we do now, without any charge? Are authorities to be brought into being which will not only increase the price of water but deny access to their land?

The Government are bringing green issues into water privatisation simply to camouflage the cost of the privatisation because they know that thousands of miles of sewage pipes and thousands of miles of lead water pipes need replacing. If those replacements are to be made under private enterprise and the enterprise has to make a profit, prices will rise.

What will happen to the people who cannot afford to pay for water? Will their water supply be turned off? Public health is another important local government function. The Government are trying to destroy local government, but here we shall have a serious public health issue.

In Committee, we shall have to consider a water rebate system along the lines of the rate rebate system, as that is the only way in which people will be able to afford the installation of meters, the rental on meters and the increased price of water.

7.10 pm

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): I shall not take up what the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) said about privatisation because of the lack of time, not out of any discourtesy.

One aspect of the Gracious Speech will have raised a great deal of interest—it is certainly important. I refer to the proposed changes to legislation which affect mergers in industry and commerce. The issue has come to the fore recently. There has been a spate of merger mania during the past few years. The matter has also come to prominence as a result of the advance towards the single market in 1992.

It is important that certain ground rules should be laid down before mergers so that industry knows where it is. There is a need in a free market system for the threat of mergers to keep businesses on their toes. That is a useful weapon, but it is generally accepted in almost every industrialised country that it is necessary to have some regulation of mergers. We were talking about sport earlier. It is crucial to have referees on the playing field of mergers.

It is important to examine history to see whether there are any lessons to be learnt. If we look back over the past 20 or 30 years and compare British industry with that in more successful economies such as West Germany and Japan, we find that we have had a much freer system. We have allowed companies to grow by acquisition rather than by organic methods. That has not been allowed in West Germany and Japan, perhaps because they learned from their special experiences of 40 years ago.

As British industry becomes stronger and as we prepare for entry into the full market, we must ensure that our system is on all fours with the others. Many people will say that we have a much more developed capital market in the City of London. That is true, and it is an asset, but it presents threats to our industry as it is much easier to raise money for very large takeovers. We must try to encourage our industry to grow more internally.

In his Budget this year, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor helped the trend that I advocated. He put capital gains tax and the top rate of income tax at the same level—40 per cent. At a stroke, he removed one of the reasons why many entrepreneurs have gone public. They have floated their companies on the market so that they can get money out at the lower rate of capital gains tax, rather than at the higher rate of income tax, which used to run at 83 or 98 per cent.

There was previously a great temptation to sell a business to maximise success at the lower rate of capital gains tax. I hope that, now the difference has been removed, more entrepreneurs will stick with their businesses. I hope that, if they wish to reward themselves —they are fully entitled to—they will take money out as income.

We must consider what is happening on the continent. Germany, Holland and, to some extent, Italy have much more difficult markets in which to take over companies. I believe in the free exchange of capital in Europe and the world. It is crucial. Britain has benefited from acquisitions overseas. The Government's responsibility is to maintain competition policy within the United Kingdom.

My right hon. Friend Lord Young made that clear in a speech on 27 October, which is published as an attractive and interesting blue book. He issued a warning which we should heed. Talking about the efficiencies which are often claimed to come from large mergers—people talk about the international competitiveness which results from mergers—he said:

"but I have to say that all too often in the past the claims have not been borne out by results, and the track record of post-merger performance does not justify our simply taking such claims on trust."

We must remember those words as we approach 1992.

We must maintain the spur of the threat of takeover, but we must also ensure that there is maximum competition in each market sector. Many of my hon. Friends may say that that is all very well, but that we have to make a judgment. There must indeed be a judgment. I am perhaps one of the least interventionist people by nature, but judgments are inevitable in the formation of competition policy.

We had to make a judgment in 1986 in regard to the attempted takeover by GEC of Plessey—a matter which has now arisen a second time. We had to judge whether the merger would reduce competition in, for example, the supply of defence equipment to the Ministry of Defence. It was decided that that would happen, so the merger was stopped.

Policy should maximise competition in each sector of the market. If a merger does not damage that competition, I would be happy for it to go ahead. The other wing of competition policy—the national interest—arises only rarely, as with BP. If we maintain competition in each market sector and encourage companies to grow organically rather than by acquisition, we shall have a more effective industry which is better able to compete in the EC and in the rest of the world.

7.17 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): One of the themes of today's debate has been housing and the Government's privatisation of it. One of my first serious parliamentary experiences—it was an experience—was sitting on the Committee which considered the Housing (Scotland) Bill. The Bill has been voted for by almost nobody. It had been rejected by more than four out of five Scots at the general election a month or two before. It was wanted by almost nobody except private landlord interests, which are by definition a small number of Scots. It was nonetheless imposed on the people of Scotland. In Committee, it was imposed by an alien majority.

Two English Members of Parliament sat on the Committee. One was the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) and the other was the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean)—the latter a deracinated Scot and the former an elegant London barrister whose experience of Scottish housing is limited, to say the least. They wrote out their Christmas cards between Divisions, but they were there when it counted. When the Divisions came, they voted the Bill through. The pattern was the same when the Bill came before the House. The experience of sitting on that Committee has proved an apt metaphor for how my country is treated by this Government and, more disappointingly and increasingly, by the House of Commons.

[Mr. George Galloway]

The Gracious Speech contains nothing about this question which has become the primary question in Scottish politics and is what I would call the national question. It has come as no surprise that the Queen's Speech is deafening in its silence on the subject. I wonder whether English Ministers of the Crown—I see one Scottish Minister on the Front Bench—realise the extent to which they have come to be regarded as essentially a foreign Government in Scotland. They show no signs in this Gracious Speech of adapting to the alienation that my country feels towards them. It was always said, and I was brought up to believe, that the British ruling elite knew that a bough which does not bend with the wind is in danger of breaking. Yet that does not seem to be the case with the national Scottish question.

The defeats of 1979 and 1983 were followed by the decimation of the Conservative party in Scotland in 1987. It was reduced to a rump Government with 10 Members of Parliament, four of whom had to sit on the Front Bench and the majority of the rest of whom could not in any conceivable circumstances be appointed to it. We have a rump Government of 10 attempting to govern a constituent part of the United Kingdom, a voluntary partner in the United Kingdom.

Instead of flexibility and nous following that decimation, the Government offered the Scots only admonition and insult. The Scots were told memorably by the then Minister for Trade and Industry, now the Secretary of State for Health, that they lacked "the enterprise culture"—Scots, from the land of Adam Smith, James Watt, Logie Baird and the world's finest engineers and scientists. We were told in a memorable editorial in a yellow newspaper to "Stop yer snivellin' Jock." We were told that the Thatcher revolution must be pressed home in Scotland, albeit on an unwilling population. So the poll tax, rejected by four out of every five Scots, had to go ahead and the opt-out proposals, wanted by no one who is anyone in Scottish education circles and supported by not a single leader writer, serious journalist, person outside the Scottish Conservative party, nor even by many members of the Scottish Conservative party, was rammed through. The privatisation of electricity and the steel industry are to be hammered home on this sullen, ungrateful Scottish population, with all the subtlety and resolute approach of Lord North dealing with the American colonies more than 200 years ago.

Increasingly in this House that attitude is seen in all its ugliness. A Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, which we shall debate next week, is the only Select Committee that has not been set up. The Scottish Office is the only Department of State which does not have a Select Committee monitoring its important work. The reason is not because the Scots do not want that or that the Department does not need it, but because the Scottish Conservative party cannot muster enough bottoms to sit on the seats to man that Committee.

With due respect to you, Mr. Speaker, Scottish Question Time has become a black farce. When the doors open at 2.30 pm in stream the obstructive and objectionable louts, bearing questions that someone else has written for them, not listening to the answers, representing English constituencies, never visiting Scotland or knowing anything about it, and doing their best to provoke and degenerate Scottish Question Time to the farce that it has become. The effect is that the 62 Opposition Members are unable to ask their questions and make their points because English Tory Back Benchers are drafted in to obstruct.

Mr. Favell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it parliamentary to call an hon. Member of this House an "objectionable lout"? I am interested in Scottish questions, I attend them and I listen carefully to what is said, and I object to being referred to as an objectionable lout. I have no objection to Scottish Members taking part in English business and I expect them to show some decorum.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was alleging that any individual Member was a lout. If he was, that would certainly have been unparliamentary. This is a United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr. Galloway: I could say that if the cap fits the hon. Gentleman could wear it, but I did not intend to refer to him in my remarks. You, Sir, know the kind of Back Benchers to whom I am referring.

The result of this arrogance and insensitivity has been an unprecedented rise in nationalism and nationalist feeling in Scotland. Anyone who denies that is simply flying in the face of reality. That nationalism is taking the form, as it did at Govan and as it has done in every opinion poll, pub, work place and street corner, in a virulent hatred of the Government who are imposing these alien policies on an unwilling population. Ministers are intelligent men and must know that what I am saying is true.

I take issue with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition who just the other week made an offensive remark in Scotland when he said that nationalists think with their blood. That was an ill-judged remark. Nationalists are all over the world—in Nicaragua, on the dusty streets of occupied Palestine and in the trenches at Stalingrad in the great patriotic war. Patriots and nationalists do not think with their blood. Many have given their blood against reaction, backwardness, Facism and undemocratic rule. That nationalism which is developing in my country is apparently being deliberately fostered by a Conservative and Unionist Government. If it is not being deliberately fostered, the Government could certainly not have done a better job of it.

The Sovereign is being ill-served by these Ministers whom she has appointed to govern the affairs of the British state in Scotland. Conservative and Unionist Ministers with a mixture of comprador complacency and cynicism are taking her United Kingdom to oblivion. I read nothing in the Gracious Speech which gives me any hope that the Government are bent on a change of course.

7.29 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the Queen's Speech as the latest instalment of major legislation from this radical and reforming Government. I wish to make two particular points that relate directly to the two subjects of today's debate, industry and the environment.

I urge my right hon. Friends, in the words of the Gracious Address, to

"continue to promote enterprise and to foster the conditions necessary for the sustained growth of output and employment."

That must mean the continuation of the policy of privatisation which has brought a smaller public sector —it is about half the size that it was in 1979—wider share ownership—which is now about three times the level of the 1979 level—and impressive levels of profitability and performance, for example, in the National Freight Corporation and Cable and Wireless.

It is vital that the policy of deregulation, at both national and EEC level, should be pursued wherever appropriate to minimise the burden of compliance costs on the wealth-creating and job-creating sectors. The Government must stick to their macro-economic policy, which has produced the right framework within which we have had seven years of steady growth at an average of 3 per cent. a year. The growth has been well balanced over the period 1981 to 1987, with a real increase in consumption of 3·5 per cent., a real increase in exports of 4 per cent. and a real increase in investment of 5 per cent. That clearly gives the lie to the argument that consumption has been out of line with investment and exports over the years.

However, in one area it is vital that the Government and the private sector should do more than has been done so far, and that is in the provision of rigorous vocational training for non-academic children in schools and colleges and in private sector provision for craft and technical workers' training in industry. A recent NIESR—National Institute of Economic and Social Research—report shows that France produces three times as many trained mechanical and electrical craftsmen as we do, and that West Germany is still further ahead in that competition.

On the vital matter of vocational education and training, I commend to my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench the *Financial Times* leader on 24 November, which said:

> "The Government has to put more resources into vocational education and think harder about the division of responsibilities between industry and schools."

Equally, the private sector must do more to train and retrain its employees, particularly when industrial profitability is at such a satisfactorily high level.

Taking as an example engineering employers and unions, it is vital that, rather than go in for excessive pay settlements which are not covered adequately by increased productivity, they should use extra resources to increase still further their training and retraining methods. Otherwise, the inevitable consequence will be that skilled labour will become increasingly scarce in buoyant economic conditions, and profitable firms will add to the dangers of inflation by bidding up pay and other remunerations to poach scarce employees or to retain those they already have. Not long ago British Airways was paying some of its computer operators loyalty bonuses equivalent to one year's salary, to retain the same workers for a further three-year period.

The argument can be viewed in the even wider context of long-term national prosperity and security. I commend to the House an interesting article by Edward Mortimer, in which he asked the rhetorical question:

> "Which is the more plausible threat to British national security in the next 10 or 20 years, that the country might be occupied by a foreign invader, or that its population might become little more than a pool of unskilled and largely unwanted labour for more advanced industrial economies?"

That is a very serious point, and I very much hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Trade and Industry and other relevant Departments will continue to press that case even harder on their colleagues in the Government.

When we have a really well educated and trained labour force we will be in a better position to cope with some of the problems that are likely to arise in the labour market, notably those that may be caused by demographic factors in the early 1990s.

My second point concerns the environment. Obviously I commend my right hon. Friends for the green thrust of the recently published Water Bill. However, I urge them to follow up my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's excellent speech to the Royal Society with a whole range of cost-effective and scientifically well-founded environmental measures. I was particularly glad to hear my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment earlier today say that there is to be further legislation on environmental matters later in this Parliament. I hope that it will not be long delayed.

Our aim should be nothing less than to achieve a better quality of economic growth that is congruent with, rather than divergent from, the need to protect the environment. I believe that, first, there must be more encouragement of investment in energy conservation and the efficient production and use of energy, such as combined heat and power. Secondly, we need more encouragement for investment in efficient mass transport systems, especially in London and the south-east and in areas near my constituency. Thirdly, we need more investment in what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has called "sustainable economic development"—that is manufactured goods without built-in obsolescence, environmentally sound vehicles, and biodegradable packaging.

The only future for Britain as an exporting nation that wants to preserve a decent standard of prosperity and quality of life is to move up-market and produce the quality goods and services which our customers around the world increasingly will expect and require. Recent evidence in a Gallup poll published in *The Daily Telegraph* showed that when given the choice between protecting the environment and holding prices down, a massive majority favoured protecting the environment.

Whatever one reads from an opinion poll, it shows the way that opinion is moving. Nine out of 10, or 88 per cent., of the sample

> "thought that the Government should pass laws to control industry and other producers of pollution, while only 5 per cent. felt that industry could be trusted to regulate itself."

That opinion poll contains a clear message. Therefore, I urge my right hon. Friends to press on with the course on which they have embarked and ensure that by the end of this Parliament we are able to build an environmental record of which we can be proud.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in her speech to the Royal Society:

> "the health of the economy and health of our environment are totally dependent upon each other."

Nowhere is that more obvious than in our vital export markets in western Europe, North America and Japan. Increasingly, our sophisticated customers will not accept motor cars which pollute above sensible, internationally agreed levels, machine tools which are unsafe, aircraft which are too noisy and design which is not ergonomically and economically sound.

Our economic future and our rising prosperity will be secure only if we meet the two vital conditions of which I

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

have spoken. We must produce many more better educated and trained people, especially by concentrating on the needs of the non-academic majority. Secondly, we must design, develop and sell goods and services which are environmentally friendly and do not further degrade the quality of our lives or, at the extreme, our chances of global survival.

7.37 pm

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): As a preamble, in examining the Gracious Speech, turning it about as much as I can and looking at it for as long as I can, I cannot find anything in it that will bring any more hope or any greater pleasure to the people of this country. Indeed, the measures outlined in the Gracious Speech will only exacerbate our problems; in particular the division between rich and poor, black and white and north and south.

I wish to speak about three separate but related matters which concern the Department of the Environment, the Gracious Speech and Government policies in that connection. First, I shall say something about the problems that have been created by the rate support grant settlement. I make no apology for mentioning my part of the world—the west midlands and Wolverhampton. As I have spoken about the rate support grant settlement in general in a previous debate, I now raise the matter of the passenger transport authority grant for the west midlands, which, on the basis of this year's outturn and next year's projected grant, has been cut by £13·1 million. Unless that is amended and changed it will have a profound effect on passenger transport in the west midlands.

It is clear that we shall see the infrastructure of our passenger transport system further eroded and the problems associated with car pollution increased as a result of the cutback in bus services. More important is the marvellous benefit which senior citizens in the west midlands have enjoyed in the past few years from their concessionary passes. For thousands of elderly people the liberalising approach to concessionary fares has been remarkable, and it has been a pleasure to see. The leisure, shopping, recreational and social opportunities for elderly people are marvellous. I fear that as a result of the cut in the grant, concessionary travel may be threatened. The Ministers met the chairman of the west midlands passenger transport committee today, and I hope that as a result of their discussions the Government and the Secretary of State for the Environment will now make some progress on that matter.

The remorseless attack on council house tenants continues unabated in this Session. The Housing and Local Government Bill places even greater penalties—financial and otherwise—on millions of people, and that is in addition to the iniquitous legislation passed during the previous two parliamentary Sessions.

Another particularly obnoxious measure in the proposals for this Session is the restriction of democratic rights and activities of thousands of good men and women in local government and the public services. I resent the fact that people giving their lives to local government and social services are deemed in some way not fit to participate in the democratic and political life of this country. The issue is, without doubt, the GCHQ of local government.

I shall now deal with the reactionary and doctrinaire privatisation of electricity and water. Opposition Members do not believe the statements made about the improvement of pollution and the environment as a result of the water measure. We do not believe the Government's assurances on the protection of the land, countryside and valuable beauty spots that will be handed over to private companies.

In view of the tremendous mess that the Government made of the recent social security legislation, what guarantees will the Secretary of State give of adequate income support for those millions of people in Britain who are on the poverty line? They will face greater hardships if higher water charges are imposed—whether it is the 7·5 per cent. or 12·5 per cent. that the Secretary of State mentioned, or the 20 per cent. plus, which may be a more realistic estimate. We know that the present water payments are inadequate, and metering will almost inevitably follow.

In my day essential reading for Socialists joining the Labour party was "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists". I am sure that essential reading for Conservative Members may have been Adam Smith. Robert Tressall identified in a graphic way the unfettered and uncontrolled march of capitalism. He wrote that the ultimate phase of capitalism would be the provision of a huge gasometer which would embrace our planet, after which one shilling of old money would be charged for every gasp of oxygen that mankind inhaled. That is happening to water in this Session, and it may be our air in the next Session.

7.45 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): The debate combines the subjects of industry and the environment, which are particularly appropriate for my constituency. The constituency of Elmet embraces a chunk of the city of Leeds, the countryside, with the towns and villages that surround it, and includes a wide range of industries. In the short time available I should like to look at how to continue and enhance the industrial advance, which is the base of our local prosperity, and how to address the by-product of that success, which is most evident in the pressure on our environment.

How will the Queen's Speech affect those two issues? The Queen's Speech promises to continue to promote the enterprise culture. That continuity is important. For industry to plan over the medium and long term it needs to have some measure of certainty about the environment that it will be facing in the years ahead. Within that continuity, what new things are promised? Electricity privatisation is promised, and I welcome that. There will be other opportunities to debate the merits of that proposal.

I particularly welcome the fact that the Yorkshire electricity board, one of the biggest of the electricity supply companies, will have its headquarters within my constituency. What that means for my local business environment is that the decision centre of one of the largest companies within the United Kingdom will be located firmly within the region that it serves. That is a vital part of regional policy. Decision centres stimulate the local economy around them. They create new professional services which overspill in their sophistication into other aspects of the local business community. They create a sub-contracting network, and that in turn feeds new industries. The economy of a region has to be broadly based and must have included within it important decision centres.

I shall look carefully at the measures proposed in the Queen's Speech for merger and competition policy. I believe that over the next decade, with the approach of 1992 and the advent of the integration of the European market, nothing will be more important than a sensitive balance in our merger and competition policy. Regions such as mine need the investment of the European industrial giants, which I hope will emerge, if we are to compete effectively with the giants of Japan and the United States. At the same time, we need our own local plcs and medium and small businesses.

That is by no means an easy balance to strike. Our tax system, as it has existed for many years, concentrates far too much shareholding power in the hands of far too few fund managers too remote from our region. We need to divert the fruits of our prosperity from consumer spending to saving. We should encourage a much broader base of individual savings, so as to have more diversity in the way in which our companies are financed.

With that diversity and prosperity comes the other side of the coin—the growing concern about the environment, which we have heard expressed on a number of occasions in this debate. That applies particularly to areas such as mine, where the countryside butts on to a city and where there are planning worries. So far we have heard various horror stories from different constituencies. I shall offer what I think is an unbeatable triumvirate. There is a proposal for a new town in the north of my constituency, a new motorway in the middle of it and a new opencast site with a river diversion in the south. Moreover, the established communities from north to south in the constituency all feel threatened by excessive and unsuitable development.

All hon. Members have raised such issues in debate, and we have to recognise that the cities, the suburbs, the towns and the countryside are not isolated from one another. They are complementary and interlocking parts of one seamless robe of our environment. It is no good pleading specially for one part without trying to develop a coherent response for the totality.

Part of the problem so far is that we are embarking on an era of rapid change and growth, but we do not have clear policies that offer to local communities predictability in advance of planning applications. We do not have rapid decision making when applications are made, or the promise of strong enforcement of planning regulations when abuses occur. That feeling of unease, in all communities, in all parts of the country that face that problem, is growing and must be addressed.

Reference has been made to the need for a White Paper on planning and the environment, and I strongly support that. When an unsuitable planning application is put forward, people simply do not know what the end result will be—although they do know that it will take a long time to be determined. Even when it has been determined, the developers can keep returning for further bites of the same cake.

What should be the main features of such a White Paper? First, where development is appropriate for an inner city, it should happen in an inner city. There is no point in developers building new towns in the countryside when areas of dereliction exist which, if they were brought forward as a level-based site, would be far more suitable for such development. The riverside development in London has produced thoroughly desirable environments, close to facilities that people want. There is no reason why such developments should not occur in all our cities in areas currently regarded as derelict. That must be the start of our policy.

Then, in the suburbs and existing towns and villages around our cities, there is a fear of excessive and unsuitable developments. We must consider the role of conservation areas and dramatically expand both their area and their enforceability. We cannot block all developments in villages, towns or suburbs, but the people living there want to ensure that any development is of a density, style, design and character compatible with the local communities. Many of the fears expressed so strongly arise because, all too often, planning powers are inadequate to deal with both density and unsuitability of developments in existing communities.

I welcome what has been said many times by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—that the green belt forms a vital bulwark in our planning regulations. If we do not move to protect our green areas, they will not be there for future generations. There will be no bulwark to prevent the expansion of the existing cities into the surrounding towns, causing ever larger and more soulless conurbations. The green belt is just as important to those living in the cities as it is to those living in the green belt itself.

Finally, I am concerned about the growth in the use of private Bills in an apparent attempt to bypass normal planning procedures. Obviously private Bills are sometimes necessary, and there is a long tradition of private Bills being so used, but there is a growing practice of using a private Bill on slender grounds to carry with it much larger planning implications. The House needs carefully to consider the way in which that procedure is developed.

This is the ninth Gracious Speech under this Government. It is extraordinary that a Government who have been in power for such a long time should have so much new and lively policy making. This Gracious Speech especially reflects how far we have come as a nation during that time, but equally it signposts how much further we still have to go.

7.53 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): At the beginning of today's debate the Secretary of State for the Environment made the rather curious statement that my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) was seeking obscurity by making a radio broadcast. If my hon. Friend wants obscurity, he should speak from the Back Benches in this House when so few hon. Members are present.

All the predictions were that the Gracious Speech would once again contain proposals further to dismantle public services, to promote private interests and to curtail public freedoms. Those predictions have once again been proved to be right. All that is being proposed will be done in the name of progress and radicalism. The truth is that the Tory party is not about new thinking, is not radical, is not progressive, and is not even very clever—except for the success of its deception. The only progressive move that

[Mr. David Clelland]

the Government are making is progressively to put the clock back, as is inevitable for a Prime Minister who looks admiringly at the Victorian era while talking of the next step forward.

All that the Government propose has been tried before. Although it is true that a strong, viable and efficient private sector is vital to our economic well-being and prospects, if privatisation is so right, so efficient, so unchallengeable in its concept and so self-evident in its progressiveness that it is sensible to hand over to its keeping public utilities that represent the very lifeblood of our nation, why was any change necessary in the first place? It is a measure of the Government's sleight of hand that the advancement to public utilities—something that was done because of the failure of the private sector—is now condemned as being a step back, while the breaking up of public utilities and a return to the old ways is hailed by the Government and their agencies as a step forward.

An unregulated, uncontrolled private sector will sacrifice all for bigger profits—whether it be health, safety, environment or people's livelihoods. As has happened only too often under this Tory Administration, if the assets are more profitable than the product, the product will be sacrificed. Making things is not important when making money is fashionable; hence the slump in our manufacturing industry. We have become not a nation of shopkeepers but a nation of shop assistants, all happily selling Japanese hi-fi's and sailing merrily along in what is thought to be a fast flowing current when, in fact, it is a whirlpool that is sucking us all down the plughole. Yet who cares, as long as they are having a good time along the way? People had better start to wake up to what is happening. They should see through the mind-numbing trivia of the tabloids.

The Gracious Speech offers a glaring example of the hypocrisy and double standards that the Government have practised over the past nine years. In the pursuance of tax cuts, they increase mortgage repayments, rents and charges for public services. In the name of wider choice, they drive council tenants out of democratic ownership into the hands of profiteers and speculators. In the interests of profit, they oppose European efforts to raise environmental standards and plan to sell life-giving water to private business and foreign investors.

The Government tell us and the country that public subsidy is wasteful and anti-competitive, yet they deliberately raise the price of electricity to industry and domestic consumers so that they can fatten up the business for prospective buyers. In order dogmatically to pursue a policy of encouraging the growth of the nuclear industry at the expense of coal, and in opposition to their deeply held view that the market should decide, they plan to extract from consumers a tax to pay a reluctant private sector and so ensure the continuance of their discredited nuclear policy.

The Government have been in power for almost 10 years, and yet the real level of unemployment remains at about 3 million. The Government have employed various devices to bring about an artificial reduction in the figures, and they are about to embark on yet another ploy. The Gracious Speech refers to removing

"unnecessary obstacles to employment, particularly in relation to women and young people."

I shudder to think what that means, coming from a Government who promoted a White Paper called "Building Businesses . . . Not Barriers" and who criticised the very planning controls that were established to protect our people and our environment, proposing freedom for business to develop virtually as it pleased and ignoring community interests.

When such a Government talk of obstacles to employment, they are not referring to their non-existent industrial policy or their destruction of 3 million jobs; they are referring to proper wages and conditions, health and safety considerations, and sickness and pension obligations on employers. It is the likes of those hard-fought-for improvements for working people that business and the Tory Government regard as obstacles to employment. Having done their best over the past 10 years to denude the trade unions of power, they believe that the time is now right to give employers the freedom to dictate wages and conditions, as indeed the Government did in the great Victorian era. Another step forward, the Prime Minister will no doubt proclaim. It is more like another nail in the coffin of civilised life in Britain.

The last Labour Government left an inheritance of falling inflation and falling unemployment—something that this Government are still unable to match. Yet, despite inheriting that jewel and improving situation, despite all the benefits of North sea oil which Labour never enjoyed, despite massive income from selling off public assets, which Labour could not have had, despite savings made at the expense of the elderly by ending the link between pensions and earnings, which Labour certainly would never have done, after almost 10 years, unemployment is still almost three times higher than it was in 1979, inflation is creeping back to the 1979 level, and we have the worst ever trade deficit. So much for the so-called economic miracle.

In the midst of all that, such is the Prime Minister's belief in the gullibility of the British people that she can tell us that we have the best Chancellor that this country has ever had. What arrogance and what nonsense, and what an insult to the intelligence of the British people.

On the subject of the trade deficit, perhaps the Minister will tell the House how the interests of trade and industry will be best served if, as is strongly rumoured, the Cabinet have decided to award a substantial order for battle tanks to an American company rather than to the British company, Vickers Defence Systems. Is he aware of the impact that such a decision will have on jobs, to say nothing of the further adverse effects on our balance of trade? Why must Opposition Members constantly remind the British Government of the importance of supporting British industry?

As a northern Member, I ask the Minister—that is, if he is listening—to tell us why our confectionery industry was sold to the Swiss, why our brewing industry is in danger of being sold to the Australians, why our water industry is being sold to the French, and why our defence industry is to be sacrificed to the Americans. Why are not the Government doing anything about that, other than facilitate the process? Is the answer that the Tory Government are the real enemies within?

The Gracious Speech contains no hope for the British people or for British industry. It is the programme of a Government who are deaf to all but those whom they wish to hear. The advice of experts, the experienced and the well informed and the wishes of the majority of people in their localities are ignored as the Government dogmatically pursue their determination to drag our country back in time.

The Gracious Speech confirms the continuation of policies that are designed to return our country to an era that is long forgotten, and, in terms of the living and working standards of British people, best forgotten. However, I suppose that the Prime Minister will disagree with that. Perhaps she will even say, "We are not amused," as she has adopted the practice of adopting the royal "We", so often employed by Queen Victoria. But this country does not exist for the amusement of the Prime Minister. M.H. Thatcher will never be H.M. Thatcher. The sooner the British people remind her of that in a general election, the sooner our civilisation will stop the march backwards, and the better it will be for all of us.

8.3 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I remind the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) that it is not only Labour Members who have shown an interest in the replacement of the Chieftain tank. No fewer than 115 of my colleagues have put down an early-day motion in which they express confidence in Vickers' development of a Challenger 2 tank. Concern about that issue is not confined to the Opposition.

I hope that you will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I deal with an issue that has not received a great deal of airing today. I shall address my remarks to Northern Ireland, and particularly to the industrial and economic development of Northern Ireland. I make no apology for doing that. In a sense, I want to show solidarity from a mainland British Member of Parliament for the grevious state of that part of the United Kingdom and for the threat that it faces from terrorism.

We often blame our Northern Irish colleagues for what we deem to be their parochialism, but we often pass down the other side of the street. It is only right and proper that, occasionally, mainland Members of Parliament talk about the Province and show concern. One person who cannot be accused of passing down the other side of the street is the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I pay tribute to his great efforts. Last week in Northern Ireland I was told that, whatever the political differences may be with the Secretary of State, he is highly regarded for his courage, firmness, ability to listen, energy and commitment to the Province. We should pay tribute to him. By his personal efforts he has attained a significant industrial development in Belfast, which might produce as many as 500 jobs from a Japanese company. He actually went to the far east to secure the order. We should pay tribute to him for that also.

Notwithstanding the great efforts of the Secretary of State and his colleagues, all is certainly not well with industry and the economy of Northern Ireland. There is considerable deindustrialisation. There is also a high level of disposable income, but that is based on over-reliance on the public sector and on low house prices. There is a need, not so much for more public investment, but for foreign investment. After all, what better door into the EEC after 1992 than Northern Ireland, with a willing work force and many development opportunities?

However, foreign industrialists have an over-exaggerated fear about security. Therefore, in the few minutes available to me, I urge my colleagues not to try to set road blocks on the path towards a solution. I do not pretend to know the solution, but I shall mention a few road blocks.

There tends to be too much of the feeling that the situation is hopeless, that it will not go away, and that there is nothing that we can do about it. I am an eternal optimist. It does no good to state that sort of opinion. There seems also to be too much of the point of view that we can deal with the situation by a military solution alone. That is not enough. There must be a political dimension.

It is significant that one right hon. Member who dealt with the issue in some depth during the debate was the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). He dealt with the border security problem. If I misrepresent him, I shall be glad to give way to him, but I hope that he was not suggesting that, by dealing with the border issue, we could solve the problem of security. That is not true. If we want to carry international opinion with us, it is not feasible to erect a type of inner-German border fence along the border, even it it were possible to do so. The proposals in the Gracious Speech represent excellent steps. I commend all the legislation that the Government are putting forward.

I hope that my colleagues will not delude Unionist Members into thinking that there is a widespread movement among Conservative Members to have the Anglo-Irish Agreement abrogated. There is no such widespread opinion. If my colleagues say such things, they simply encourage Unionist Members to talk themselves into a blind alley of intransigence. The Anglo-Irish Agreement will survive, not because the Prime Minister or the Taoiseach are concerned about losing face, but because, if the agreement is abrogated, minority parties in Northern Ireland will refuse in any circumstances to become involved in talks leading to devolution. Whether we like it or not, the Anglo-Irish Agreement is with us.

I urge caution also in the Patrick Ryan affair. I hope that he will be extradited. I would not want to comment on his guilt or innocence, but clearly he should face a fair and proper trial. However, I caution against the view that it is a political decision. Under the Criminal Jurisdiction Act 1976 of the Republic, it is fundamentally a legal decision, not a political one. The Attorney-General must be satisfied that there is a sufficiency of evidence on the face of the warrant, and that decision is made on legal grounds. Whether or not Patrick Ryan is extradited—and I hope that he will be—I hope that his case is not seen as a litmus test of the success or otherwise of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

In a very difficult situation, we should try to find ways forward instead of trying to set up road blocks. We should try to encourage our Unionist colleagues—and I do not seek to lecture them—to think about a way forward that will make practical sense. The only way forward is along a devolution path based on a Bill of Rights, proportional representation, and some kind of weighted majority voting. I should not like to speculate on the details. I am sure that, ultimately, some sort of compromise is possible.

Perhaps we could look at the Anglo-Irish Agreement in terms of amending it in a European Community dimension. The powers over Northern Ireland given to the Republic are insignificant compared to the powers given to the Commission over both the Republic and the United Kingdom under the Single European Act. In terms of a European-wide dimension it may be possible for Unionist

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

leaders to hammer out some kind of compromise so that we can knock heads together and hold talks that will lead to devolution.

Many years ago I read John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress". That book told of a wicket gate to which one had to find the key to be allowed on to the Delectable Mountain. I do not know the key to the Northern Ireland problem, but it is essential that men of good will should talk together. I do not ask them to agree, but they should at least talk, because unless they do that we shall never defeat the men of evil.

8.10 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I thought that there might be some advantages in being returned to the Back Benches, but I not so sure about that, because I have had to listen to a debate that has suffered because it has been so broad ranging. I wish that it had been more specific to the issue of the environment, because that is one of the most important issues facing us.

I agree with the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste), who spoke about the private Bill procedure. I am tempted to go down that road because, as the hon. Gentleman knows, I have a special interest in that procedure. I hope that the reforms that we are putting before the House will control what undoubtedly has been happening. Planning permission is being given by the back door for environmental projects that would never have received planning permission if they had gone through the proper public planning procedure.

I should like to concentrate on one matter in my constituency. If the Secretary of State for the Environment were here, I would present him with a bouquet of flowers. It is a quaint continental custom to present men with flowers as often as one presents them to women. My flowers would be rather special because they would be the species called phurnacitis narcissus. The narcissus is a pretty white flower, but in my constituency it is black because it is polluted by the Phurnacite plant. A recent environment programme on the BBC, the *New Scientist* and various journalists and organisations, have dubbed it the worst industrial polluter in Britain.

The plant makes smokeless fuel, but that term is ironic given the structure of the plant, which looks like something from the early industrial revolution. Its chimneys belch smoke of all colours day and night. What goes up must come down, and it comes down over people's cars, their newly-painted houses, their washing and their gardens. It is an appalling sight.

The plant is a wholly owned subsidiary of British Coal and everyone, including Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, believes that it is a relic of a bygone age. The national energy policy and a desperate need to protect jobs in my constituency, which has the highest male unemployment rate in Wales, have kept the plant open, despite all its critics. It has recently been described as Dante's Inferno mk 2, and that is no exaggeration.

The valley is one of the nicest in south Wales, and this plant is a great blot on the landscape. A 1978 inquiry into the works said:

> "The confirming influence of the surrounding hills inhibits the dispersal of any effluents and tends to channel them in the direction of highest population density. Prolonged and severe temperature inversions during winter lead to a build-up of pollution."

When there was no fog elsewhere, very often there was fog in that area.

At the moment the plant employs about 500 people, and in addition keeps hundreds of local miners at work. Closing the plant would have serious employment repercussions for the people in the plant and for the people in the few pits that are left in the area.

In the view of the strong anti-pollution committee that has been formed there, the plant has blighted the prospect of new jobs in the area. That is pure speculation, because there is no hard evidence to confirm that view. That is unfortunate, and it is a weakness of the Welsh Development Agency, the Welsh Office and of those responsible for trying to attract industry into the area that they cannot tell us whether the plant is a disincentive. If the Irish Government can collect statistics of that kind, I do not understand why our Government cannot do something as simple. As the *New Scientist* put it, Cynon Valley is trapped meteorologically, politically and economically with its pollution. I wish that the Secretary of State were here to tell me precisely what he will do to solve the problems in my constituency.

In 1986 Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution served an improvement notice on the plant under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, but the company appealed against it to an industrial tribunal on the ground, among others, that it could not afford to buy any new equipment. The tribunal upheld the company's case, revealing massive gaps in the present law. In this country there are no legal standards for emissions such as those that exist in the United States.

After pressure from the Secretary of State for Wales, the company recently announced that investment of about £3 million in the first stage of a five-year programme is to be made at the plant that will enable it to use a new and cleaner process. That is what British Coal Products Ltd. tells us. There will be a mild heat treatment process to phase out each of the remaining four Disticoke factories, and the company says that that will result in a considerable reduction in pollution. The managing director of British Coal Products Ltd. told a public meeting recently that that was the case. He said that the process had been tried out in Scotland and that it had worked there.

The people in the area have heard such promises before from National Smokeless Fuels, and now from British Coal Products Ltd., which is simply the same company with a change of name. They have carried out a check in Hamilton on the process that we are told will clean up the environment in Cynon Valley. I have discussed the matter with my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and we are asking for an appointment with the chairman of British Coal so that we can discuss it. Complaints were made about such things as unacceptable levels of coal dust, smells caused by the products produced by the breakdown of molasses used in the process, and coal stones caused by dust emissions due to weather conditions, and there was a general expression of concern at utterly untenable situations that are regarded as having the potential for nuisance and health risk.

That is the process that the company intends to bring into Cynon Valley. Cynon Valley has suffered for 39 years from pollution from this works, and we are now saying that this is unacceptable. The Secretary of State for the

Environment and British Coal must tell us the facts, because we think that the facts are not as the company would have us believe. Apparently the company requires no planning permission to bring this process into Cynon Valley. I find it impossible to square that with the promises made by the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Prime Minister.

The Library has done a good piece of research for us. It tried to obtain an unbiased opinion on the mild heat treatment process, and it has told me that that has proved difficult. A member of the Library said:

> "one of our senior academics speaking off the cuff has informed me that there is no one in the UK working in this field. Given access to the smokeless fuel plants, there are academics who could carry out the type of measurements needed to assess the hazards of MHT, but unless this happens only the Coal Board know how dangerous MHT really is."

It is ridiculous to hear the Secretary of State say that he will put things right all over the country, and to hear the Prime Minister say:

> "No generation has a freehold on this earth. All we have is a life tenancy—with a full repairing lease and this Government intends to meet the terms of the lease in full."

The Coal Board has taken enough out of the Cynon Valley and its people. It is time it put something back, and it is certainly time that it cleaned up the environment.

8.20 pm

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): I shall not be as specific as the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), nor as broad-ranging as some of the earlier contributors to the debate. I have considerable sympathy for the predicament of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley. No doubt she well recalls that I spent more than a month there as parliamentary aide to the Conservative candidate during the by-election at which she was elected. I sympathise with the hon. Member for Cynon Valley because of the environmental problems of her constituency.

I want to say a few words about both industry and the environment, the subjects for debate today. The Gracious Speech makes clear the Government's determination to "continue to promote enterprise and to foster the conditions necessary for sustained growth of output and employment." Increasing enterprise and increasing growth of output and employment are evident throughout the Principality of Wales.

I wish to quote from two pieces of mail that I received at the end of last week. I hasten to add that neither of them is an off-the-record briefing from Mr. Bernard Ingham or from Conservative Central Office. Both are highly objective assessments of what is currently happening in the Principality. The first example is from the regional newsletter of the Welsh Development Agency, *Link '88*:

> "Wales is now one of the fastest growing regions in the United Kingdom . . . in terms of securing new jobs WINvest is the best performing inward investment team in the country . . . regarding property, the Agency is increasing significantly its expenditure . . . following vacancy rates falling to their lowest level for many years."

The second quote comes from a leaflet announcing a seminar on "Money for Growth" from four local enterprise agencies in the county of Clwyd, of which my constituency is a part:

> "Clwyd is booming! Stories about major companies moving into or expanding within the County are a weekly occurrence. British Aerospace, Continental Can, Kimberly-Clark, Pilkington, Japanese firms such as Hoya and Optec—the roll call is impressive. Not since the sixties has the economic climate here looked so good."

Delyn, in my constituency, has the fastest falling unemployment rate of the 38 parliamentary constituencies of Wales, just as Wales has one of the fastest falling unemployment rates of any part of the country. In the past year unemployment in my constituency fell by 31 per cent.; in the past two years it has gone down by nearly 50 per cent. The Gracious Speech modestly pledges that the Government will continue that trend. In Delyn that trend is not continuing; it is accelerating.

Since June, a further 1,000 jobs have been announced and more announcements are in the pipeline. Delyn is but a microcosm of the Principality——

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Come on!

Mr. Raffan: The hon. Gentleman can make his speech later. It does not suit the hon. Gentleman's party political interests to see Wales doing so well because that will mean no Govan in Wales. The hon. Gentleman is well aware that he will have to fight very hard to cling on to his own seat because of the economic boom in the Principality, which has also affected his constituency.

In the past year, the unemployment rate in Wales has gone down 21 per cent. and in the past two years it has fallen 32 per cent. Wales, like Clwyd, is booming. The Principality's economy is being dramatically transformed. Stories of new companies moving into or expanding in the Principality are a weekly occurrence. Last month, Ford announced the biggest ever investment in the Principality, which is also the biggest ever single investment by any motor manufacturer in the United Kingdom—£725 million, or £715 for every household in the Principality. That money will create and safeguard 2,500 jobs. NFC Contract Distribution in Chepstow has announced a £16 million investment, which will mean 240 jobs. Bluebird Toys has announced a £12·4 million investment at Merthyr which will create 400 permanent and 200 seasonal jobs. March Race Electronics has announced a three-year expansion in Talbot Green and in Aberdare which will lead to a total of 1,350 jobs.

Wales has 5 per cent. of the United Kingdom's population, but it has achieved a 20 per cent. share of inward investment projects. That is the highest share of any area in Britain, higher that the 16 per cent. share obtained by the south-east. I am sure that the hon. Members for Cynon Valley and for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) would not argue with that. The Government are fostering that growth. They are encouraging it by a larger than ever investment in industry and in the WDA. In 1988-89, the level of assistance to Welsh industry is a massive 39 per cent. more than planned.

Of course there are still black spots and the valleys, in particular, have serious problems. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales announced his valleys initiative in June. That initiative has led to a record factory building programme, a record urban programme, a record house improvement programme and a record derelict land clearance programme, all being carried out by a Conservative Government. In June the then shadow Secretary of State for Wales tabled a motion —he was sacked a month or so ago and replaced by his sacked predecessor. It is almost as difficult to keep up with the shenanigans within the Welsh Labour party as it is with EastEnders; the plot is as complicated as are the

[Mr. Raffan]

personalities. In June the then shadow Secretary of State for Wales tabled a motion to try to shore up his sagging position which said:

> "That this House deplores the unacceptable level of deprivation and disadvantage in Wales."

I agree with the hon. Member for Cynon Valley that that deprivation and disadvantage is no more evident than in the valleys. I agreed with the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) when he made that point in his speech. But why did the last Labour Government do nothing about it? They had the opportunity. It is no use the Opposition Front Bench spokesmen saying, as was said today, "It was 10 years ago." It is as though they think that 10 years' penance is sufficient to erase their record. It is as though they think we should all be infected by the amnesia which has broken out in epidemic proportions on the Opposition Benches. It is as though they expect us to forget when Labour was last tested in office. But why should we? Why should we forget how Labour performed when it was last tested? The Labour Government failed abysmally and they did nothing for their own areas in the valleys. It was left to this Government to act.

We cannot be accused of party political advantage as a result of our valleys initiative. After all, the dozen or so seats there are held by Labour with majorities varying from that of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) —God knows how he does it—of more than 30,000 to that of the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. John)—which is marginal!—of 17,000. It is not as though we will benefit in party political terms from the valleys initiative.

The Opposition cannot stomach the fact that we have done something for their political heartland that they never did. They cannot stomach the fact that we have improved the environment, the quality of life, employment and industrial opportunities which the Labour Government lamentably failed to do when they had the chance.

We still have serious problems within the Principality —but they are the problems of success. When we had the Welsh day debate earlier in the year, and in June when we discussed deprivation and disadvantage in Wales, I mentioned that parts of the Principality were suffering from serious skills shortages. In my own constituency there is a shortage of metal workers and sewing machinists. Local surveys need to be undertaken so that we can match skill shortages with the necessary training.

Now, in addition, we are facing labour shortages. One of the fastest-expanding companies in my constituency is having great difficulty in recruiting female labour, despite the fact that 802 women there are registered as unemployed. Last Thursday, the chairman of the Wales tourist board made exactly the same point when he spoke at the annual general meeting of the North Wales tourism council. He said that demographic changes will lead to a very marked reduction in the number of young people entering the labour force. Schemes must be devised to attract married women and retired people back to work.

In Wales we always say that water is a "burning" issue. It dominated the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs during the 1979-83 Parliament. That Committee produced a massive report on water. It also played a significant part in the last Parliament when the Committee carried out an inquiry into coastal sewage pollution in Wales.

In 1984, when we were taking evidence from the chairman of the Welsh water authority, during discussions on the authority's capital works programme, I asked him:

> "Perhaps you would rather be in the position of a private company so that you would then be able to borrow according to your needs?"

He replied:

> "The proposition has immediate appeal."

My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) said at the beginning of the debate on the Loyal Address:

> "the water industry . . . has for too long been restricted in its ability to raise capital to meet the rising standards, expectations and increasing obligations that have been heaped upon it."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 1988; Vol. 142, c. 9.]

Privatisation will free the water authorities from the constraints of the Government's external financing limits so that they can borrow more money as they require and thus accelerate their capital programme. That point—the need for freedom from Government financial constraints —was made by the Plaid representative and was argued eloquently earlier in the debate by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). It is of particular importance to the Welsh water authority because it has the longest coastline of any water authority in this country and faces tremendous demands on its capital programme. The authority has 112 outfalls discharging into coastal waters, a quarter of the total for England and Wales. Only 6 per cent. of those are less than 10 years old, 75 per cent. are more than 20 years old and 40 per cent. are more than 40 years old.

I am strongly in favour of water privatisation, but time does not permit me to give further arguments in support of this measure. I hope that I shall have the chance to do so on Second Reading of the Bill and I hope that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn will be here to listen to me again on that occasion.

It is no use the Labour party saying that we could free the water authorities from the EFL and that the capital programmes could be accelerated without privatisation. Why did that not happen under nationalisation? The Labour party did not do it when it had an opportunity to do so between 1974 and 1979. Nationalisation has not served the consumer well, but privatisation will.

8.31 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Despite the excited hype of the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan), the Government's legislative programme for the current Session shows that they pay scant regard to the real problems facing people in Wales. While Scotland and Northern Ireland are given separate treatment—albeit not in an acceptable form—in terms of legislation, Wales is given no special consideration. Nothing set out in the programme will alleviate the economic problems in many parts of Wales, which have not been described by the hon. Gentleman. He did not mention the collapsing morale in the Health Service, the precarious position of the Welsh language, the scandal of youth unemployment and the enormous problems facing our old people, many of them in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, who face another winter wondering whether to spend their pension allowance on food or adequate heating.

I wish to concentrate tonight on the proposal to sell off the electricity supply industry, having regard to the fact that there is a nuclear power station in my constituency and a proposal to build another. We have been told that there will be an application for planning consent for a PWR station in the spring of next year. The people of Ynys Môn want to know whether the privatisation of the industry has any implications for the current and proposed nuclear power stations.

Since the Government published their White Paper in February this year, we have witnessed an unedifying power struggle between the Department of Energy and the CEGB over the structure of the electricity industry after privatisation. That has particular significance for nuclear power. The people of Ynys Môn feel very much like pawns in this struggle and, as any chess player knows, pawns are often sacrificed as either side moves in for the kill. My constituents, including those who work at the present power station, believe that they are being kept constantly in the dark, with no power to influence events, while decisions over which they have absolutely no control are being taken.

Eventually, when decisions are taken, both in terms of legislation in this House and in terms of the specific application for planning consent for a new nuclear power station, they will be taken without sufficient regard to their opinions, their jobs, and their welfare. It is their lives, their jobs and their safety with which the Government and the CEGB are playing, yet their views are being disregarded.

The fundamental question is whether nuclear power has a future after privatisation. As the Government have been so reluctant to disclose their plans in advance, we —the people who now feel so powerless—have had to look to leaks in the press for information and, according to the press, the portents for nuclear power do not appear to be good unless, as we have heard many times today, there is a hidden subsidy for the nuclear programme. That is the paradox that faces the Government.

The Government have a manifesto commitment to privatise the industry and they also claim to have a strong commitment to maintain the nuclear programme. The Secretary of State acknowledged in his evidence to the Select Committee on Energy earlier this year that the commitment to maintain a nuclear programme has had a substantial impact on the chosen structure of the industry. In other privatisation cases, the Government have maintained that privatisation would mean more secure jobs and a better service to consumers, and that competition would lead to lower prices. The Government know that they cannot claim that with the sale of the electricity supply industry and the Secretary of State himself acknowledged, again in evidence to the Select Committee, that the Government were advised from a marketability point of view that, if the nuclear power component were too large in any particular company, it would be difficult to market.

We also have the experience of the United States, where they stopped building nuclear power stations in the 1970s. Evidence submitted to the Hinkley Point 'C' inquiry confirms that view. In evidence an electricity adviser to several large United Kingdom companies said that there had been no orders for nuclear plants in the United States for a decade. All those ordered between 1974 and 1978 have since been cancelled. In the United States, nuclear power has caused widespread financial difficulties and depressed share prices of utilities.

When the Secretary of State was questioned on these matters by the Select Committee, he was remarkably coy about the full cost of maintaining a nuclear programme, which could not be left entirely to private industry. How can the Government claim that privatisation means a better choice for consumers and that an element of competition in the electricity supply industry will lead to lower electricity bills, when it is now clear that institutional investors are baulking at the idea of investment in an industry which has a commitment to provide 15 to 20 per cent. of its energy through nuclear power? How does the Government's free enterprise approach of letting the market decide square with the fact that nuclear power cannot continue as an important sector of the electricity supply industry unless there is Government support or the cost is passed on to the consumer, leading to higher electricity charges?

A leader in *The Independent* put the case starkly. It stated:

> "If the Government was really committed to market economics, it would buy its nuclear plant from France, and shut the British nuclear construction industry completely. The Government does not have the courage of its convictions when it comes to nuclear power, and we are going to be left muddling through with a typically unhappy British compromise."

A further report, published by Saloman Brothers investment advisers, said that the main problem with nuclear power was the unknown cost. The cost of decommissioning nuclear power stations was not yet known because it had not been done on a large scale. Sir Philip Jones, the chairman of the Electricity Council, said in evidence to the Select Committee:

> "All I am suggesting to you is I think it is likely that a private company may well find or may consider the financial and social risks not ones which it would put at the top of the list in support of nuclear and, therefore, in one way or another the nuclear component will need to be underpinned."

The recommendations of the Select Committee show very clearly that it was unhappy with the way that the Government had approached legislation on that matter. It was concerned about the timescale that the Government had imposed to privatise the industry and said:

> "Electricity is too important an industry for the country to gamble that everything will come out right."

However, perhaps the most damning indictment of the Government's legislation in terms of the privatisation of the electricity industry was when the Committee stated:

> "The Government has singled out only two factors to justify its decision: security of supply and party manifesto commitment to a continung nuclear programme. It has glossed over the industry's economics, ignored the industry's external costs, and still cannot be sure that the favoured PWR technology is the best available."

How do the Government find their way out of the dilemma? We are told through the press that there is to be a so-called nuclear tax. Is that the Government's answer to the strong warning from the CEGB that it would not accept the risk of building nuclear reactors after privatisation? We are told in leaks to the press that the Bill will require all independent producers above a minimum size to levy a nuclear surcharge on their customers.

There are implications for employment within the industry after privatisation. There is considerable concern at the Wylfa power station in my constituency over the employment of outside contractors and the threat to existing full-time jobs in the short and medium terms. One of the significant arguments used by the CEGB in its case for a second nuclear power station in the area is the economic benefits that would flow from a large investment. It is clear that privatisation would destroy that argument.

[Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones]

Why are the Government still determined to privatise the electricity industry when they face all the problems that are inherent in its transfer to the private sector? They cannot guarantee adequate competition. They are not applying so-called market economics and they cannot guarantee that consumers will obtain cheaper electricity in the long run. I am driven to the conclusion that in this instance, as in so many others, the Government are interested only in their own ideological dogma, and in this case it is clearly divorced from reality. Would it not be far better to leave the industry in the public sector, where such an important utility should be, and give it sufficient resources to carry out adequate research into alternative forms of energy supply? That would provide the Government with the diversity of energy sources that they claim they are seeking desperately to achieve.

8.42 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): I am pleased to see the reference in the Gracious Speech to

"firm financial policies designed to bear down on inflation."

It is of course legitimate for Opposition Members to say that the rate of inflation has increased, but I am satisfied that action is being taken by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer—*[Interruption.]*—and by the Government generally to reduce it. I shall be happy in a year's time to confront Opposition Members who are now trying to barrack me. I am clear, having seen the effects of the inflation that was created by the Opposition when they were in government in three regions of the United Kingdom—the north of England, the west midlands and Scotland—that there is no greater killer of jobs or the prospects of companies than inflation. As I have said, I am certain that inflation will have been reduced in a year's time.

I am delighted also to read in the Gracious Speech that the Government

"will continue to promote enterprise".

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) that in economic terms the regions of the United Kingdom are doing extremely well. In fact, the northern regions are doing better than the southern regions. Like my hon. Friend, however, I believe that we require to encourage home-grown companies in all regions of the United Kingdom. I say this because it is a fact that when a recession or downturn comes along, subsidiaries of large companies tend to disappear like snow on a spring day.

I am pleased to see the reference in the Gracious Speech to the need for more training for the work force. It is clear to anyone who examines these matters that the economy is moving at such a speed that in some areas companies are beginning to run out of labour, and not only skilled labour. There is a need to bring the long-term unemployed back into employment, and companies, in self-interest, will dictate that this happens.

Before 1979, I saw companies with low morale in the regions of the United Kingdom. There were companies that could not overcome opposition anywhere in Europe or the world. Companies were overmanned and under-performing. Senior managers would use every excuse on the face of the earth to justify their companies' under-performance. Those excuses are all too reminiscent. I used to hear about a strong pound and too powerful unions. We do not hear the union excuse now. It was said that energy costs were too high and that wage claims were too high—it seemed that companies were unable to resist such claims before 1979. I think that I am entitled to say that since 1979, however, the industrial recovery, notwithstanding the tactical difficulties that may be encountered from time to time, has been nothing short of miraculous. That owes a great deal to the eight Gracious Speeches which preceded the one that we are now discussing. There will be some Opposition Members who disagree with me, and they should examine the facts. If they read the regional economic reports of the CBI, which deal with every region of the United Kingdom, I challenge any Opposition Member to find a reference that suggests that any of these areas are worried about their economic performance. I shall save hon. Members a great deal of time by saying that no region has that worry. In addition if Opposition Members examine the facts—it is clear that they do not often do so—they will find that this year alone there has been a 7 per cent. improvement in productivity growth. Every year since 1979 there has been, on average, a 4·5 per cent. improvement.

I believe that the success of the Government's industrial policy has also been based on a rejection of protectionism. That is something of which Opposition Members are exceedingly fond of talking. They like to talk about artificially protecting United Kingdom industry from the competition outwith this country. I reject that notion. I am delighted that the Government have rejected it in the Gracious Speech and in the ones that preceded it. It is clear that the Government accept, as I do, an open international market place. One manifestation of that approach is that since 1986 United Kingdom companies have invested about £24 billion in the United States, western Europe and Australia in addition to the record amount of capital investment that has taken place within the United Kingdom.

It is no good Opposition Members shaking their heads. What I have said is fact. We know that £20 billion has been invested in company acquisitions in the United States, £3 billion in western Europe and £$\frac{3}{4}$ billion in Australia. Conversely, 500 successful bids have occurred within the United Kingdom involving foreign companies. The United Kingdom need not fear overseas investment in the same way that overseas countries need not fear an inflow of United Kingdom investment. Far too many people—many of them are on the Opposition Benches—seem to ignore the facts of merger policy. We have the usual Pavlovian responses from Scottish Members, and as far as I can see there is not one Scottish Opposition Member in the Chamber.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The hon. Gentleman cannot see very far.

Mr. Cran: It seems that there is one. That is splendid. He might have the opportunity to express his point of view once I have expressed mine.

Mr. Clarke: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cran: I shall give way once I have made my position clear.

Whenever a major Scottish company is threatened by take-overs in any way, the first thing that happens is Scottish flag-waving chauvinism. That comes to the fore irrespective of financial or industrial logic. That is exactly the same approach that we hear from Opposition

Members who seem to want a fortress Britain in terms of industrial policy to repel all industrial boarders. When they say that, they do not acknowledge the right of the Americans to say exactly the same, bearing in mind the amount of investment that we have made in America. The Americans could say exactly the same—that if we do not allow their companies to buy into our country, why should they allow our companies to buy into theirs? If we all retreated to such a policy we would all be worse off. The Government are correct to want the free movement of capital—inwards and outwards.

The Government must therefore re-establish what they mean by merger policy especially as they relate to foreign companies. I believe that that merger policy has absolutely nothing to do with trying to save companies from predators whether those predators come from within the United Kingdom or elsewhere. In most of the Scottish cases that I can think of, the predators come from overseas, which I believe to be an irrelevant factor.

The Government must also re-establish the fact that merger policy has absolutely nothing to do with insulating inefficient management or, generally speaking, cocooning them. Merger policy has everything to do with encouraging competition which at the end of the day protects the consumer. I look forward to the legislation referred to in the Gracious Speech, which states:

> "Legislation will be introduced to reform . . . the law on mergers."

It is clear to me that that is what is required to get the law right and to air in this House and elsewhere exactly what we mean by merger and competition policy.

8.51 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I want to deal with one of the main aspects of the Gracious Speech, the environment. However, the subject for today's debate is environment and industry. Some parts of the Gracious Speech, in particular the references to changing section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, will make it far more difficult for local government to support local industry. That support is very important in areas like mine and in the area represented by the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran), because county councils have done a tremendous job in encouraging industry. My district council has played its part through support for industry and through the enterprise boards which have been established by many Labour-controlled local authorities. That funding under section 137 is threatened, and I hope that the Minister will consider carefully the representations from local authorities before the proposals are finalised.

The two major proposed privatisations—of the electricity and water industries—have major environmental implications and consequences. Before I deal with the consequences, I want to consider the Government's so-called commitment to the environment.

The Nature Conservancy Council has done a marvellous job in identifying and protecting important wildlife habitat sites. However, that organisation's budget is being cut by 5 per cent. this financial year. That does not seem to be a commitment to green issues from a Government who are prepared to slash the budget of their foremost body in terms of protection of the environment. That 5 per cent. cut will almost certainly be passed on to the voluntary conservation bodies which do so much to manage reserves and sensitive environmental sites.

The existing legislation as it applies to sites of special scientific interest is not by any means sufficient or strong enough to protect those sites at the moment. Until March 1988, 166 SSSIs had been damaged, in particular by agriculture. Another main culprit was development.

That brings me to one of my main fears about the privatisation of the water industry. One of the great attractions of the water industry is its large tracts of land. Many people interested in purchasing sections of the water industry must have their eyes on that land and its potential for development. That is a serious threat when we consider what has happened in previous privatisations, in particular the British Aerospace purchase of the Royal Ordnance factories, which were purchased, not for investment purposes or to strengthen them, but to develop the land and sell it off and so make a quick killing through asset stripping. I do not believe that the provisions in the Water Bill protect many of those very scenic tracts of land from such exploitation.

We must also consider the question of access to that land. Large areas of water authority land are currently managed as nature reserves. Will that management continue, and will the voluntary bodies managing them at the moment continue to have access and co-operation? What about charges for the many thousands of people who use water authority land for recreation, including boating, angling or simply for walking? Will their rights be protected?

This debate should have given the Government an opportunity to tackle some of the major environmental consequences of the electricity and water industries. We all know that there is a serious problem with acid rain. We also know that there is a serious problem with regard to the investment needed in our generating capacity. We are also aware that more research is required to develop alternatives. It is no use the Secretary of State talking about nuclear power as the answer to the greenhouse effect. I do not believe that wall-to-wall nuclear power stations is the answer. It is a gimmick to try to justify nuclear power now that we know that the economic arguments do not stand up to examination.

No one involved with the conservation movement could be reassured by the Minister's opening speech, particularly as it was made by the Minister who put forward the idea of privatising nature reserves and who said that property developers are not in it for financial gain. No one can have confidence in his comments.

We need controls in other areas such as the importation of toxic waste. In my constituency we are surrounded by redundant ironstone mines. They are ideal places in which to dump toxic waste. Already a private company has made approaches to use one site, Roxby Gullet mine, as a dump for refuse and waste. The mines have been overgrown for many years and they are sites of particular interest. They are important ecological sites and they could be developed for the benefit of wildlife, the ecology and local people. They could also be developed to enhance the environment and the community.

At the moment there is too weak a restriction on the people who wish to exploit those sites for personal gain. There is too much of the creed of greed and not enough guarantees for the future of the environment and our whole ecological system.

I should like the Government to carry out some of their environmental promises, but unfortunately I am not convinced because their deeds do not match their words.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

Perhaps the Minister will confirm that in a recent EEC meeting of Environment Ministers to discuss proposed directives to protect SSSIs and important ecological sites the only two countries that opposed the directives were Spain and this country. It does not give much support to claims that the Government are interested in green issues when they are one of only two European Governments trying to frustrate progress on the protection of the environment.

I hope that when the Government talk about green issues they are talking about genuine progress and protection, and not about the gullibility of those who believe that they are doing something.

8.59 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I am glad to see that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my hon. and learned Friend the Minister responsible for water and planning are present, because I too wish to speak about environmental issues.

In an excellent speech earlier this evening, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) explained that the suburban environment was being seriously damaged by the wish of conservationists to conserve the open countryside at any cost. He told us how, in his constituency, gardens were disappearing, playing fields were being built on and all available open space was being developed.

That is happening in the north as well. When I was first elected as Member of Parliament for Stockport there was a farm in my urban constituency; that has now gone. Is a farm any less valuable because it happens to be within a town boundary? In the south of my constituency, a nine-hole golf course that has been operated for years by one of the major employers, Mirlees, is about to disappear as well. Surely that, too, is no less valuable because it happens to be within the town boundary. People living in towns also want open spaces in which their children can play and they can walk their dogs.

Affordable housing, especially for the young, is affected by excessively tight controls. Over the past two or three years northern Members have watched fascinated as southern Members have argued about their housing problems. In the south, Labour Members have suggested more council housing—although, judging by much of the council housing south of the river here, goodness only knows why. Certainly we do not want any more such housing in the north. The Liberals appear to support anything favoured by their constituents and to attack anything not favoured by them. My colleagues in the south seem to be evenly divided between those who want no kind of comprehensive development—they use the phrase, "the concreting of the south-east", although goodness knows how the whole south-east could be concreted—and those led by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who say that the Conservative party is the party of home ownership and that it is essential to provide affordable housing for the young.

I must say that I agree with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. A report prepared recently for the Association of District Councils by Bristol university estimated that half the families in the south-east do not earn enough to buy a small starter flat, of which the average price is now £62,000. That is not good enough, says my right hon. Friend. He said at the Conservative party conference:

> "Our duty as a party must be to allow for sufficient homes to be provided to house decently all our fellow citizens."

That must indeed by our prime aim. It must certainly come before the conservation of the open countryside at any cost.

The selfishness of those who are prepared to deny the young a home to conserve their own uninterrupted view is breathtaking. That is certainly not what we want in the north where, alas, prices now seem to have taken off. I do not want the "I'm all right, Jack" attitude that appears to have been prevailing in many parts of the south to be applied to my constituents and their children.

Like my right hon. Friend, I understand the importance of the green belt and the narrow belt surrounding existing developments. I do not want those areas to be concreted over, and I should like the derelict land in our cities recycled, but there is a limited amount of that. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North said earlier, it is not recycling derelict land to build on gardens, to erect concrete blocks within feet of bedroom windows and to obstruct every piece of open space in the suburbs where so many thousands live.

The danger signals in the north are there for all to see. The latest property market report of the Inland Revenue valuation office shows an extraordinary increase in the price of building land over the last year, with 57·5 per cent. of that increase in the north-west, 109 per cent. in Yorkshire and Humberside and 127 per cent. in the east midlands. Just picture the effect of those increases on the price of new houses in the north. New houses are so often the choice of the first-time buyer. Picture also the effect on the quality of that type of housing. If the price of land is doubled, people will still have to buy houses, but the quality will go down.

Many of those who live in the country say that they do not want modern houses to be built there because they are not of the right quality, but if the price of land is doubled it will result in poor quality housing. The price of land, therefore, must be controlled and brought down. The only way to do that, as with anything else, is to increase the supply of land. That is the choice: tight planning controls, thereby pricing young people out of the housing market, or relaxing the planning controls, with the result that our children will have the same opportunities as we enjoyed.

9.6 pm

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): The future of our country is inextricably linked to its industrial development. I intend to concentrate on one thing that the Government can and must do to enable all our citizens to participate fully in our industrial society and to enable it to grow and compete. They must encourage the development and skills of the work force and enable the skilled members of our society to take advantage of the jobs that are available.

We recognise that some action has been taken to address skills shortages. City technology colleges may make a welcome contribution, but one vital area that may not seem to be of immediate importance will, on closer examination, be ignored at our peril. I refer to child care.

Child care—particularly nursery education—is vital to industry in two fundamental ways. First, without proper care for their children during working hours many able, qualified and committed women are unable to work. Either they stay at home or they take menial or mundane jobs that have no other recommendation than that the needs of their small children can be accommodated.

Secondly, without taking more seriously the education of the under-fives, we place at risk our future development as a society. The foundations for every academic discipline can be found in early childhood. Children's learning is extremely complex, but recent evidence suggests that the proportion of learning and problem solving before the age of five is colossal—far greater than we appreciated in the past. Computer experience and second language development should start as early as the age of three. Other European countries are taking that course, and we must consider taking it, too.

Women in the work force is becoming an increasingly topical issue as the penny begins to drop that, with the impending demographic changes, the decline in the working age of the population and the increase in the number of dependent pensioners, there will be a shortage of workers in all spheres of life. Recent estimates suggest that by 1993, 50 per cent. of all girls leaving school will have to be recruited into the National Health Service just to make ends meet.

It is not only socially desirable to enable everyone to participate fully in society and in the labour market—women as well as men—but it will be economically imperative in the near future. There is a great reservoir of skill and ability available that is largely untapped at present—that is, women with children. Many mothers simply do not even contemplate working because they know that finding good, affordable childcare is almost impossible. Where good childcare facilities exist, they are invariably characterised by long waiting lists and prohibitively high costs.

There have been signs that the Government are beginning to respond to the need for strategic planning to avert the worst problems of the shortfall in the labour market in the future but, characteristically, there seems to be a feeling that, with the right exhortation, the invisible hand will provide.

It is perhaps hard for a Government who are rooted in so-called Victorian values to be seen to be encouraging women with children to go back to work. I do not expect action that is motivated by a commitment to equality of opportunity from the Government, but the economic case for childcare for working mothers is unanswerable. We now have less than half the number of places in state nurseries that we had in 1945 and only one in five of our children receives proper nursery education. It is time that we committed more of the country's wealth to measures that will not only assist the development of a more skilled and economically active work force in the long run, when the children taking advantage of nursery education come to maturity, but will, in the short term, enable the current skills of women to be fully used.

The Government must be aware of the report on childcare provision that was prepared by Bronwen Cohen for the Equal Opportunities Commission, as part of the European Commission's study. The Government must know about it because they have been deliberating on it for a long time and have, as yet, declined to tell us their formal response. I regret that we have had to wait for labour scarcity to provide the lever to press for the provision of nursery education, but however that nursery education is achieved, it will be welcome.

The report stresses how poor our record is compared with the record of our European competitors, not only in terms of the quantity of provision, but the quality. The report suggests a number of targets that we should set ourselves to improve dramatically the provision of childcare, both to benefit the child and to enable mothers to work if they want to. The first target is that we should provide places in nursery schools for 90 per cent. of four-year-olds and 50 per cent. of three-year olds by 1993. The cost of that would rise to about £650 million a year by 1993 if all those places were funded directly. That is not an outrageous demand—in fact, it was first established in 1972 in a Department of Education and Science White Paper, when the Prime Minister was Secretary of State. The question that we should ask ourselves is not whether we can afford it, but whether we can afford the loss of human potential, both in terms of the working mothers we could make available now, and in the skill of the work force in 20 years' time. The provision of nursery education is not only right but cost-effective.

The Government could facilitate the provision of pre-school daycare and nursery education in various ways. Tax incentives are always an effective means of generating greater private sector interest in new ideas. Tax incentives for joint employer or workplace nurseries would undoubtedly succeed in increasing childcare provision. Adding an incentive to provide places for women without jobs to enable them to train or to return to their education would be to go one step further. One immediate thing that the Chancellor could do is to abolish the mean-spirited tax on employees who benefit from nurseries provided by their employers.

I return now to the vital importance of the educational quality of under-fives provision. I refer to learning through creativity and play, not to cramming in inappropriate primary classes for three and four-year-olds, but with the intelligent, informed expertise of teachers who are specially trained to deal with that age group. That is what is required. Young children should not just be shelved and kept from harm, entrusted to those who are incapable of really understanding their needs, development and potential. They need a high ration of caring, intelligent and well-educated adults and the provision of play if they are to reach their full potential in later life. We need trained adults who are accountable to parents and governors, not just well-meaning do-gooders who are playing school with live children. We need more than just nine-to-three provision. We need an extended day facility where required. What jobs are available between 9.45 and 2.15 for the mothers of children currently in most state nurseries?

As international comparisons starkly show, children who have the chance of pre-school education benefit in later years with greater confidence and a more positive attitude to learning. Damage done by the age of five, especially to a child's self-esteem, may be irreparable. Improving the lamentable statistics on the number of children receiving pre-school education is a vital step in building a motivated, skilled and flexible work force.

We all talk about improving standards in education. No one is absolutely sure how to do that, but one irrefutable way is to take the education of under-fives far more seriously. A comprehensive national policy for children and for educational provision for the under-fives

[Mrs. Rosie Barnes]

is long overdue. It will work for all our citizens and it will work for industry. Without it, society and industry will be immeasurably poorer.

9.17 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I should like to speak briefly on behalf of an industry which does not pollute, which flourishes particularly in Scotland and Wales, which works well in providing high quality work of high pay for women and young people as well as for men, and which requires little Government support. However, one facet of its work is that something so successful attracts predators. I am referring not to mergers or unwanted suitors, but to actual thieves. I speak of intellectual property theft and the computer software industry.

The common buzz word is computer "hacking." It is seen as a graduate's amusement—something graduates train themselves on just for fun. They penetrate particular systems and then withdraw saying that they did not know what a mistake they had made. Talk of viruses and worms is commonplace. It is not the sort of worm that Shakespeare would have welcomed if he had seen it in the bud.

This summer, in the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill which is now an Act, we managed to insert a fine of £2,000, which was designed to deter computer hackers. In Britain we still have much work to do in the copyright industry in giving evidence for the European Green Paper, in supporting the Uruguay round of the GATT agreement, in which copyright may be involved in the negotiations, in supporting China in its search for a fresh copyright law—the first ever copyright law on computer software—which may well be in place within a year, and in welcoming the United States of America into the Berne convention, which it joined last week—a convention that started 101 years ago when Mark Twain wanted better recompense for his work.

A fine of £2,000 is not enough to stamp out the enormous abuses that will soon affect Government and industry alike. It is imperative that the Department of Trade and Industry brings pressure, and its expertise, to bear on the Home Office, and that industry makes representations so that we get a much more rapid response and a proper criminal law put in place earlier than might otherwise be the case.

I can now do no more than put down a marker that I shall table parliamentary questions and call for the earliest action by the Government on this crucial matter.

9.19 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): Nobody needs convincing that the flavour of the month—perhaps one ought to say colour of the month—is green. That is why we have that amazingly bland and uninformative sentence in the Gracious Speech. It is all language and no commitment, all illusion and no substance. There is, of course, a precedent. Last year, the inner cities were all the rage. They were the fashionable topic, but where are they now? There is no mention of inner cities in the Queen's Speech this year. They have disappeared from view.

The lesson is instructive, but not just because the issues are similar. The Government's conversion to the environment is likely to be as superficial as their conversion to the inner cities proved to be. The conversion proceeds, not from any real conviction that these matters are of some significance—far from it—but from the meanest and crudest calculations of electoral expediency.

The inner cities had the temerity in the general election to elect Labour Members of Parliament. That is why the Prime Minister said, "we will have them next time." That is why they moved to the top of her agenda last year. There is an equally crude electoral consideration in respect of the environment. The opinion polls show that there is a rising tide of concern about environmental issues. That is why, after 10 years of ignoring them, the Prime Minister has suddenly been converted.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Will the hon. Gentleman reconcile what he is saying with the testimony given today by Mr. Stanley Clinton Davis, in which he said that in vital respects of waste disposal and toxic waste disposal Government policies are entirely consistent with the requirements of the Common Market? If the hon. Gentleman doubts what I say, I refer him to the official report of the Environment Select Committee's proceedings.

Mr. Gould: I prefer to rely on the much more generally applicable and much more condemnatory statements made by the European Commissioner on many occasions recently.

For both the environment and inner cities, we know that the response has to be merely cosmetic. It can be nothing else. On the environment, a Government and Secretary of State who argue that everything must be left to the market cannot possibly grapple with the issues. The same forces are at work with the inner cities, but they are reinforced by the Prime Minister's hostility to local government and her antipathy to public spending.

The result is that all we have had on the inner cities are political and electoral gestures. We have had the glossy brochures, the cosmetic packages and the £400 a head breakfasts, but nothing has really been done to resolve the problems.

All that fits in well with the new style Department of Trade and Industry under the stewardship of the current Secretary of State. Lord Young is, I suppose, the longest serving Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for quite some time but they are not a long-lived breed under this Government. Perhaps he should have joined his predecessors a little sooner. It is fairly clear from his record that six months is about the limit of his usefulness. Six months give him all the time he needs to design a dashing new logo and to initiate the programme of television advertising for 1992, which is his only contribution to preparing British industry for that momentous occasion. Having done the things he is good at, I am afraid that all the rest has been downhill.

We see that superficiality, lack of engagement and disclaimer of responsibility for inner cities right across the board in the stewardship of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. He may be called the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, but he shows an airy lack of concern for British trade and industry. Despite his title, he seems to imply that the success or failure of British industry has nothing to do with him. It is the market alone which decides and disposes—that infallible market which must prevail. The DTI's role is simply to get out of the way.

We detected in this afternoon's debate, even from Conservative Members such as the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) and the hon, Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls), who professed to be the keenest of all free marketeers, that even they were anxious about where reliance on market forces would take us. The truth is that if we rely on market forces and see no role whatever for the Government, the DTI, far from being the powerhouse that it can and should be, and is in other countries, is simply a black hole imploding on itself.

The consequence of that is that we miss major opportunities that other countries well know how to exploit. Japan, France, Germany, Italy and even the United States—all successful economies—have a level of Government-industry co-operation that we have never contemplated, certainly under this Government. That means that the role of the Government in industry in co-operating, planning and enabling is simply lost and we are the weaker for it.

We see signs of the irresponsibility of the Secretary of State everywhere throughout his jurisdiction and perhaps, surprisingly, even in matters such as Barlow Clowes. Lord Young simply washed his hands of the obvious failures, deficiencies and derelictions of duty of his Department. That has meant that he has also washed his hands of the fate of 1,800 investors who should have been able to expect better of him. That irresponsibility was compounded by a willingness to mislead and to draw conclusions which could not be substantiated from the Le Quesne report. That report could not attribute and apportion blame because the Secretary of State told those involved to consider only the facts, but no one reading that report could draw the conclusions from it which Lord Young put to another place and which appear to exonerate his Department from responsibility. That means that we must now look to the ombudsman to bring Lord Young to a proper realisation of his responsibilities.

We see similar slipperiness and slipshodness in two further recent decisions by the Secretary of State. After Elders' purchase of Scottish and Newcastle shares and the decision to refer its bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission—the purchase raised its shareholding from 15 to nearly 25 per cent.—Lord Young was aghast, slapped the company over the wrist, but left it in possession of those shares acquired against the normally accepted rules. That is a classic example of ineffective rules applied by an ineffectual Minister. That episode demonstrates clearly that it is time we had proper statutory rules that mean what they say and are enforced in the same way and to the same degree as rules are enforced in every other part of our national life.

Even more curious was the recent decision not to refer the El Fayed bid for House of Fraser, despite undescribed, unidentified irregularities in it which, we understand, should command the attention of the serious fraud office. In other words, there were irregularities affecting the bid so serious as to go to the serious fraud office, yet we are told that nothing is to touch the validity of the bid. The Secretary of State's decision on that issue demonstrates a touching concern for the reputation of one of his predecessors, the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). It is only to be regretted that that concern does not seem to be reciprocated. The decision is a typical piece of Youngery and adds to the confusion to which merger policy has now sunk.

As the hon. Member for Surrey, North-West said, the Secretary of State presides over the biggest explosion of takeover activity in our history. The assets involved dwarf our national budget for the NHS or for defence, yet the noble Lord seems to have no view on the massive survey and academic evidence that shows that the scale of takeovers is positively harmful to those involved and to the national economy. The Secretary of State seems to have no view on whether it should be encouraged or discouraged, or whether it matters that British industry should fall into foreign hands. He has no recognition of the special problems facing Britain because of the openness of our market to corporate control. He has nothing to say except to parrot the tautology that competition policy is about competition.

The result is a series of bewilderingly confusing decisions on British Airways and British Caledonian, on Rowntrees, on Kuwaiti oil investment in British Petroleum and on Scottish and Newcastle Breweries. Who in the House can now predict what the Secretary of State's decision will be on any given issue, or which way he will jump on GEC and Plessey? That possibility is very remote because we simply do not know what criteria he now believes to be important. However, we do understand that those whose interests are most closely affected are least likely to be consulted.

A prime example of what happens when a confused ideology meets the real world occurs when the Secretary of State occasionally ventures into action, on those occasions when he decides to pursue one of his ill-judged forays into privatisation. When he does that, surprisingly, his beloved market does not seem to come up to scratch or to deliver the goods.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: No. I shall press on because we are very short of time.

The National Engineering Laboratory is a successful research establishment of great importance to the Scottish economy, doing very valuable research and providing a forum of collaborative ventures for British industry. For reasons of dogma, it is to be privatised, yet, to the embarrassment and confusion of the Secretary of State, we discover that the only private buyer available has mysteriously disappeared. That confusion has yet to be cleared up.

Girobank is another success story in the public sector. It is a bank created by the public sector by a Labour Government to make good the deficiencies of the private clearing banks, yet again, for reasons of privatisation dogma, we find that Girobank is to be privatised. Yet again the Secretary of State finds that those elusive private buyers are suddenly slipping through his fingers. Those buyers have not materialised, and the price which now seems available is only half the price originally thought to be available. Yet again the consequence is quite unnecessary damage and uncertainty to a successful public enterprise.

North East Shipbuilders Limited is perhaps the most extreme example of dogma prevailing over reality. I heard someone say "stupid". But it does not seem stupid to a

[Mr. Gould]

shipyard worker on the Wear. Let us be quite clear that what is now threatening the future of those yards is not the absence of orders. The orders are there and can be pursued. There are orders from Cuba and from West Germany, and there may well be orders from British shipowners in future. There are also reports that the Danish ferries are the object of a purchasing bid by a Greek shipowner. There is no shortage of potential business.

What is stifling the future of those shipyards is dogma. The Government will not allow those orders to proceed, and will not allow the intervention fund help that is required until a private buyer is found. Yet again the absence of a private buyer will be allowed to destroy 2,000 jobs in shipbuilding, 6,000 jobs on Wearside and, most important of all, in the face of all market logic, as the shipbuilding industry turns up in terms of worldwide demand, it will threaten the survival of a major and essential British industry.

Even where privatisation is carried out and regarded as a success in its own terms, it is still bad news. For example, British Steel is to be privatised at a price that means that the taxpayer is defrauded of £200 million. Even at that knock-down price the success of that flotation must now be in jeopardy. Those unnecessary risks are to be taken in order to jeopardise the future of an industry, the long history of which shows that its pattern and cycle of investment and demand make it unsuited to private ownership. Private owners will not stick with it for the time needed and will not provide the investment necessary to preserve its future.

Even more problematical is the privatisation of Rover, which is being sold to British Aerospace. The great salesman himself—that is his only claim to expertise—in this deal showed how maladroit he is. First, he maximised market opportunities by excluding all other potential buyers. Secondly, he negotiated a price—or giveaway—from which the European Commission had to rescue him by saying that he had offered £150 million worth of taxpayers' money more than was needed to clinch the deal. Thirdly, he handed over assets to British Aerospace of substantial value. They were so substantial as to confirm suspicions that British Aerospace is involved in an asset-stripping operation and that the Secretary of State does not care a fig for the future of the car industry, provided he can get rid of it from his desk. The Secretary of State likes a tidy desk. Unfortunately, his means of keeping his desk clear is to throw his files into the dustbin or into the hands of anybody who will walk away with them.

In case there is any suggestion that I am exaggerating, let me draw the House's attention to a memorandum from Warburg Securities to its investment clients, headed

> "British Aerospace. Recommendation: buy. Price 492p."

It says:

> "Asset valuation: £10.48 a share. The enlarged British Aerospace group—safely delivered yesterday—has assets valued at £10.48p per share—more than double the current share price."

It goes on:

> "Our property valuation for all BAe, Rover and Royal Ordnance sites itemised overleaf shows that Professor Roland Smith now commands 14,323 acres worth over £2 billion. And we estimate surplus properties to be worth £1·13 billion."

It then lists in substantial detail many of the sites given away to British Aerospace in the deals with Rover and Royal Ordnance. Many of the sites contribute substantially to "easily realisable"—the words of the brochure—surplus land that will net, on its estimation, over £1 billion. That is a scandalous waste and defrauds the taxpayer. It is a matter that should be drawn to the attention of the Public Accounts Committee, and I intend so to do.

That sad catalogue means that it is not surprising that when we draw back and look at the broader picture of what has happened to British industry we find that manufacturing output, having lost 20 per cent. during the early part of the decade, has only just crept back to where it started, that investment is still lower than it was in 1979, that employment in manufacturing has fallen by 2 million jobs, that our trade deficit is heading into the stratosphere, that our investment is worse than it has ever been, and that our share of world markets is lower.

No voice from the Department of Trade and Industry is speaking out for British industry. The Secretary of State's partner in crime—and, typically, the Secretary of State is the sleeping partner—is the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is about to repeat the same old mistakes. Having weakened the economy through excessively high interest rates and an overvalued currency, he then unleashed a level of demand that it could not conceivably meet. Now he proposes to punish us all over again by pushing up interest rates yet higher and the pound to an even more ridiculous rate. The Chancellor has his own problems. He has a strategy with no escape hatch. The only way that he can escape is by changing the strategy, but his political credibility would be fatally damaged if he were to do so. That is why we are stuck in this predicament.

What of the Secretary of State? Where is he? What is his view? Do we hear his voice? Does he agree that the balance of payments deficit in manufactures is neither here nor there? Does he say that a £15 billion deficit on our trade is a problem of success? Does he agree that that deficit can be financed by hot money? Does he say that there is no limit to the level to which British interest rates might rise? Does he say that British industry can continue to compete even as the pound rises to 3·20 deutschmarks and beyond? Or does he agree with Greenwells, which said in a research paper published today that the Chancellor's strategy is mistaken, that the deficit will become worse, not better, that it arises because of the competitive weakness of British industry, and that the Chancellor's policies are making that problem worse?

Which is it? Does the Secretary of State go silently and sheepishly with the Chancellor, or does he speak up for British industry? If he disagrees, when will we hear his voice? When will he raise that voice in the interests of British industry? If he agrees and is willing to sit silently by and watch British industry crucified, he must go before more damage is done. We can no longer afford a Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who will not do his job.

9.43 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Tony Newton): Whatever we may disagree about, there is clearly something on which the whole House will agree, and that is that the link between the industrialists' views and the environmentalists' views has been the theme of today's debate. Obviously industrial and commercial activity can have unwelcome effects on the environment, whether it be planning or pollution. However, that is a case for a sensible and effective system to counter or mitigate those effects; it is not a case against industry and commerce or against economic growth. On the contrary, it is abundantly clear that a strong, competitive and profitable industry within a growing economy is an essential prerequisite for achieving our environmental aims and in sustaining the cost of measures rightly demanded of industry itself as well as in generating the wealth to pay for protecting and improving our surroundings in other more general ways.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said in his very interesting speech, the very existence of a growing demand and opportunities for environmental protection and the prevention of pollution are themselves an opportunity for new industries to thrive and grow. In an important sense, therefore, the foundation of the Government's environmental policies is the policy that has so significantly raised the level of this country's capacity to generate wealth in recent years. Thus, we have opened choices, including the choice of devoting more resources to environmental aims that would previously have been closed.

In the light of what the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said in the last few minutes, I make no apologies whatever for reminding the House once again of the degree of industrial recovery that has taken place in this country in the past eight years. We have had eight years of uninterrupted economic growth at an average of 3 per cent. That is the longest period of such growth for half a century, I tell the hon. Gentleman. *[Interruption.]* I shall come to the hon. Gentleman's interest in a moment. In this economy, since 1980—*[Interruption.]* I shall come to 1979 in a minute. Productivity growth in this economy since 1980 has been equal to that of Japan and better than that of all other major industrial countries.

In manufacturing, on which the hon. Gentleman focused, productivity is up by no less than 60 per cent. in that same period. Industrial profitability—the profitability from which the wealth to pay for our environmental measures comes—is at its best level for nearly 20 years, at over 10 per cent. in real terms for the non-North sea sector. Manufacturing productivity, at 9 per cent. in real terms, is at its highest level for many years. Investment in manufacturing is expected to be up 18 per cent. for this year alone.

I have been asked about 1979 and about manufacturing output. The hon. Gentleman will be aware, because he stated it somewhat grudgingly, that manufacturing output is now at record levels. That does not mean that it is higher than in 1979 only. It means that it is higher than in 1974, because it was still lower in 1979 than it had been in 1974. It fell when the last Labour Government were in office. What is more, since 1981, the United Kingdom's share of world trade in manufactures has stopped falling for the first time in a century. That reflects the restoration by British industry of its reputation for the quality, design and performance of its products and, no doubt, the end of this country's reputation as the most strike-torn country in the world.

Mr. Gould: In making the point about our share of world trade in manufactures, the right hon. Gentleman would not want to overlook the best and, indeed, only recent evidence that we have from the ITEM club, which showed that our share of world trade in manufactures had fallen to 6·9 per cent., its lowest level ever.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman had an exchange with the Chancellor of the Exchequer in a debate some weeks ago on that very matter. The reference that he made to the report to which he referred was based on a misunderstanding that has already been cleared up. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This has been a well-conducted debate. We must give the Chancellor of the Duchy a fair hearing.

Mr. Newton: One of the most striking things about the British economy is that it is not only our own investors who have shown so much willingness and confidence to invest in our country, but those from overseas as well. I have with me some figures from the Invest in Britain Bureau which show that in the past 10 years about 2,250 overseas investment projects in this country worth £10·75 billion have created or safeguarded nearly 250,000 jobs. That is the foreign vote of confidence in the British economy under the present Administration.

The other matter brought out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was the extent to which this greater industrial wealth that has been created has opened the way for greater expenditure on the environmental issues that are a matter of concern to us all. There is a £1 billion programme for the cleansing of power station emissions and an even larger programme of £1·2 billion over the next four years for improving sewage treatment and disposal. There is a £70 million a year programme for improving the quality of coastal waters and attempts are being made to deal with the problem of vehicle emissions.

My right hon. Friend spoke about other matters such as the international lead that Britain has given in seeking to tackle the problem of chlorofluorocarbons and their damage to our environment. Action is being taken to deal with the acid rain caused by our power stations, and work is going on to curb pollution in the North sea.

A major theme of the Gracious Speech is to carry forward the policies on which this country's industrial and economic resurgence have been based. One important aspect of that is the policy of privatisation which has featured largely in the debate. Against the background of what has been achieved and the way in which it is now being copied throughout the world——

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): The Minister speaks about privatisation. Is he aware that the Royal Ordnance factory at Bishopton has productivity that is second to none? It is a profit-making firm, and yet the Government are allowing it to be closed.

Mr. Newton: I have spoken to people concerned with one of the Royal Ordnance factories, the one at Patricroft in the north-west rather than the one about which the hon. Gentleman speaks, and I am well aware of the purpose and point of what British Aerospace is seeking to do with the factories. It is seeking to make sure that the work is carried out in a way that safeguards the jobs of the maximum number of people. If the Government that the hon. Member would no doubt have supported had faced that need in a wide range of industries over a longer period, we would not now be facing many of the difficulties with which we are seeking to deal.

[Mr. Newton]

In view of some of the comments in the debate, I must reiterate what my right hon. Friend said about the Water Bill and its importance for the protection of the environment. The proposed creation of the National Rivers Authority, which will be responsible for the health of the rivers, estuaries and coastal waters in England and Wales and which will be guided by statutory river quality standards, is a major step towards improving control of the environment. The public health interest in the supply of drinking water will be met by my right hon. Friend setting statutory requirements and by local authorities' continuing scrutiny of the quality of water supplies.

Some of what has been said in the debate is far fetched in the light of the fact that a quarter of the population of England and Wales already receives its drinking water from the private sector, the statutory water companies. No less significant than our policy of returning much of the public sector of industry to the more competitive framework of the private sector is the range of measures to strengthen competition policy and to enhance the opportunity for encouragement of enterprise at every level. That is reflected by the enterprise initiative and by the huge volume of applications for assisted consultancy that we have received. It is reflected in the record figures for the creation of new small businesses, and it is reflected by the response throughout industry, both large and small, to the campaign to equip British industry for the challenge of 1992.

Nowhere is the link between the industrial policy and the environment clearer than in some of the less prosperous regions and those which, as a form of shorthand, we call the inner cities. Their problems have starkly shown the consequences of what happens to the environment when there is no secure and expanding industrial base. It follows that nowhere are the benefits of the greater national prosperity that we have created clearer than in those parts of the country which have faced some of the worst difficulties of earlier failures to bring about the necessary industrial change and to get the economy on the move.

I am well aware that the Opposition do not like being told some of the facts about the improvements. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I repeat that we must give the Chancellor of the Duchy a fair hearing. He has five minutes more.

Mr. Newton: In the past years—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is there any way in which you can stop the Opposition Front Bench from behaving like a charabanc of giggling schoolboys with the Leader of the Opposition as head girl?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already made that point clear.

Mr. Newton: In the past year, the largest falls in the rate of unemployment have been recorded in the west midlands, Wales, the northern region and the north-west. The greater industrial prosperity that has been created is now clearly spreading to all our regions.

The greater confidence of British industry to invest is matched by the greater willingness of people overseas to invest in the English regions, as was made clear by the recent announcement from Ford of new plant in south Wales with an investment totalling £725 million which will create or safeguard 2,500 jobs.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North) *rose*——

Mr. Newton: No, I shall not give way.

That example is matched by what has happened in the past 10 years when nearly 1,300 foreign investment projects, worth more than £7·5 billion, have gone to areas which have received regional selective assistance of more than £700 million. As a result 200,000 jobs have been created or safeguarded.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Newton: Something that exposes more clearly than anything else the claims that the Opposition have sought to make today is what has happened to spending on capital programmes of key importance to the environment. On roads, spending went down by 40 per cent. under Labour, but it has gone up by 30 per cent. under us. On railways, spending was static under Labour, but it has gone up by 15 per cent. under us. On hospitals, spending went down by nearly a third under Labour, but it has gone up by more than 40 per cent. under us.

When the hon. Member for Dagenham talks of our references being all illusion and no substance, he fails to remember the record of the Labour Government, who were all words and no action. They never put their money where their mouths were because they never had the money to do it.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 237, Noes 348.

Division No. 1] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.

Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrea, Rev William
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin

McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.

Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian

Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael

Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil

MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*

Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David

Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones and
Mr. Michael Neubert.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

European Community (Transport)

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Peter Bottomley): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7325/88 on transport infrastructure and 6047/88 on aids for transport; and endorses the Government's opposition both to the creation of a transport infrastructure spending instrument and to the extension of Regulation (EEC) No. 1107/70 to cover the granting of aids for certain transport operating costs.

We are considering two proposals. The first, document 7325/88, would create a spending programme for transport infrastructure. The Commission would use general criteria to select projects from a generalised list, and would ascribe to its selection funding drawn from the transport infrastructure line of the European budget. The programme would run until the end of 1992.

The Government welcome some aspects. We accept the need to review whether there are gaps or bottlenecks in the Community transport network. We are, however, opposed to the measure as a whole. The Community should not proliferate spending instruments. Transport infrastructure can be and is supported from the Community's existing structural funds—for example, the European regional development fund. Structural funds are being substantially increased up to 1993. Where schemes are not eligible for existing funds, they should be provided at the expense of member states or by private funding.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I am delighted to hear of the Government's opposition to this new extravagance by the EEC, and particularly to the proposed spending on the infrastructure of the Channel tunnel, but will the Minister tell us whether the proposal will be decided by majority vote by the EEC Council of Ministers —in which case the Government's objection can be overruled—or whether there must be unanimity? In other words, are we wasting our time tonight because the matter will be decided by majority vote on the Council?

Mr. Bottomley: It would be decided by majority vote, but I do not believe that we are wasting our time, and I hope that others will take the view that the Government are inviting the House to take. If this is one of the occasions on which my hon. Friend says that he is wasting his time by being here, the House may miss hearing what he has to say later.

It is impossible to assess the financial implications of the proposal as no figures for costs of schemes or allocation of funding by the Commission appear in it. We believe that the Council and not the Commission should have the determining role over financial allocation.

The second document, 6047/88, would prolong to 1992 existing arrangements which empower member states to grant subsidies for infrastructure investment in connection with combined transport operations. It would also allow aids to be granted against operating costs associated with combined transport.

The existing arrangements have been in place since 1982 but member states have made little use of them. Equally little use has been made of the existing combined transport facilities by either the United Kingdom or other states' hauliers.

The Government can accept, without much enthusiasm, the extension of existing powers for subsidies for infrastructure investment. We are opposed to the extension of the scope to embrace operating costs as well. Although the draft directive refers to the granting of aids "as a temporary measure," the word "temporary" is not defined. The proposal could open a loophole for the continuing payment of operating cost subsidies by some member states.

Subsidies distort competition. Freight transport should operate on a commercial basis. If these types of operation or their infrastructure are in demand, there should be no problem about providing appropriate facilities on a commercial basis. The Government are opposed to both measures. The House should endorse the motion.

10.19 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): If we had an excellent road system that enabled private vehicles and commercial freight to travel on it, the Minister's comments might have had some substance. Similarly, if we had a rail system by which freight and passenger transport could travel with ease throughout the country, the Minister's remarks might have been relevant. The reality is that we have one of the worst road and rail systems in western Europe.

The Minister referred to Britain being able to compete on equal terms, but he is some years out of date. He said that there was no room for subsidy in the allocation of freight costs, but I must point out to him that for many years West Germany heavily subsidised new freight handling facilities. Similarly, if the Minister looks at what is happening in France, he will see that the French have been happy to take advantage of the money that has been made available by the European Community. That is the reason why Britain lags so far behind West Germany and France in its ability to carry passengers and freight.

I do not disagree with all that the Minister said. The Opposition are adamant that matters of this kind should not be decided by the Commission. I represent a constituency in the north-east. A quick glance at the Commission's proposals shows that the Commission has no idea that part of this nation lies outside the south-east. The Commission's action programme is confined exclusively to activities in the south-east—to London and the Channel tunnel. People who live elsewhere in the country object to proposals of that kind.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): I think I heard the hon. Gentleman say that he does not oppose all that my hon. Friend the Minister said. So that we can make sense of his remarks, will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether he is for or against the motion?

Mr. Lloyd: There are two documents before the House. The Government, with a degree of sleight of hand, have confused the two and put them together, so it is important to spell out the Opposition's disagreement and agreement. If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, that agreement and disagreement will become apparent.

It is unacceptable that the Commission should decide the priorities that are applicable to this country. The Minister regaled the House with his Euro anger. He said that it would be unacceptable to take money for this purpose from the Community. I remind him, however, of the comments of his hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) in a debate on the European Communities budget in 1984. Money was being allocated by the European Community for the transport

[Mr. Lloyd]

infrastructure. The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) asked his hon. Friend whether these matters ought to be decided by national Governments, and the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North said:

> "Decisions on road building are for the Government to make, and will remain so. However, I hope that my hon. Friend will welcome, as much as I do, any Community funds that are available to assist with the financing of such roads and to solve the problem of our refunds."—*[Official Report*, 20 February 1984; Vol. 54, c. 576.]

I must put into context my reason for giving that quotation. Can the Minister respond to the question that was put to him by his hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), who asked about the criteria for majority voting? We know from experience that majority voting means that the British Government have to accept what is imposed by other European Community countries. Will the Minister make it clear in his closing remarks whether he expects Britain to receive support within the Council of Ministers on these matters?

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It always strikes me as better to consider the proposal on its merits first, and then to consider other countries' attitudes. As I understand it, our opposition to the proposal on infrastructure is shared by Germany, France, the Netherlands and Denmark, so we expect that the proposal will not be adopted. We believe that most other countries share our lukewarm attitude to the proposal on combined transport. *[Interruption.]* It is unclear whether the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) is speaking in opposition to the Government's attitude or is talking to his hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), whom we welcome back to transport. I do not know whether the combined transport proposal will ever be adopted by the Community.

Mr. Lloyd: I want to welcome the Minister back to transport because he does not seem to have discussed transport yet. On the basis of what he has told us, it is unclear whether the Government expect that there will be a qualified majority in favour of the proposal that deals with combined transport initiatives. It is important for the House to know. We know that the Germans, French, Belgians, Danes and Dutch have all adopted similar infrastructure schemes and have received money from the European Community. The Minister has expressed some surprise about that, so I suggest that he reads the documentation that has been made available by the Vote Office. It gives precise details about the nations that have received support for such schemes in the past.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am not sure whether I am helping or hindering by intervening occasionally. On page 6 of the letter of 6 May 1988 from the Commission, it says, "Germany: no aids granted."

Mr. Lloyd: I have had the advantage of reading the whole document, which the Minister has not. If he reads a little further he will see it spelt out comprehensively that the reason the Germans did not receive aid under that heading was that they received aid under a different heading. If the Minister wants to debate the issue seriously, will he read the documents before coming to the House? It is important to argue on the basis of facts, rather than play a silly Oxford Union debating game—in which I have no ambition to take part. The Germans have received money from the Community over many years for such activities. The Germans no longer require that money because they have finished their programme of investment in aids to combined transport schemes and have a system that operates in the way in which ours should.

I am pleased that the Minister for Public Transport is with us this evening. Outside the south-east there is considerable concern about the Channel tunnel and about the capacity of the regions to have an adequate investment in the road and rail freight facilities that most people in the transport industry accept are needed in order to maximise the benefits of the rail system through the tunnel into Europe. The European Community scheme that we are discussing would at least have the merit of making money available for such schemes.

I stress again that those schemes are far better carried out when the priorities are established by national Governments. However, this Government want the worst of both worlds. They want to deny the European Community the ability to finance the schemes, yet they want to turn their back on regions such as my own in the north-west, Yorkshire, Humberside and Scotland. They say that unless the private sector is prepared to provide the finance it will not be available. The Government have made it clear—and the Minister has reiterated the point—that freight transport must operate on a commercial basis, without subsidies. Can the Minister tell us why Britain alone in western Europe takes that view?

The Minister says that the Government believe that private funds will be available to meet infrastructure demands. Can he tell us why other countries have invested in schemes to ensure that they allow for development of the freight industry based on an integrated approach? Such development does not take place overnight.

Does the Minister seriously believe that the market system has been able to allocate costs acceptably when he knows that schemes are being put forward throughout the country in terms, for example, of consultations with British Rail, under section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987, which, when it comes to the crunch, the Government will refuse to finance, on narrow financial grounds, taking no account whatsoever of the regional and social costs that will be imposed by such a refusal? Such subsidies are needed in the context of the Channel tunnel. Such subsidies have been recognised by the French in their investments in north-eastern France, and by the West Germans in their investments between 1980 and 1985. I accept that the Minister did not know about that investment, but if he reads the document it will become apparent to him that the West Germans made that kind of investment. Is the Minister aware that we in Britain are the ones who are out of step in terms of such investment?

We shall vote against the Government precisely because of their dog-in-the-manger attitude to that kind of investment. We shall vote against the motion, which congratulates the Government on their pig-headed, obstinate and ostrich-like stance in not being prepared to accept the benefits of such investment in freight handling schemes. If the Minister will say that the Government have had a change of view, if instead of saying that freight should operate only on a commercial basis and without subsidy, if he will stand at the Dispatch Box and say that he has reviewed the situation and recognises the crassness and foolishness of the Government's position and the unfairness of its impact on regions outside the south-east, and if the Minister, who represents a south-eastern seat and a south-eastern Government, is prepared to say that at last the Government recognise that they have got it wrong in terms of a freight structure for the rest of the nation, Opposition Members will be prepared to reconsider their decision on which way to vote. However, we know that the Minister will not do that. We know that the Government are locked into the market forces game.

Even at Question Time today, the Minister said that the public were often unaware of the causes of the holdups on our motorways. He waxed eloquent about the tragedies of the accidents on our motorways. Is he aware that our motorway system is often clogged up, not because of accidents, but because of incompetence in his Department, in the repair programme for which it has been responsible for 10 years, and because of its failure to invest in a decent roads programme over those years? That is why we cannot afford to turn our backs on the concept of combined transportation schemes or on the idea of an integrated road-rail system. Until the Minister frees the motorway system, the Opposition will have to take the Government to task for their inability to invest in the future.

Therefore, I challenge the Minister. If he is prepared to accept that market forces are not delivering the goods, have not delivered the goods, and will not deliver the goods in the future, we shall reconsider the way in which we shall vote tonight. However, in the absence of that kind of commitment, I advise the Minister that we shall vote against the Government and their pig-headed stance because we are determined to see properly funded public and private transport industries operating in conjunction with each other, in the interests of the whole nation.

10.33 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): The two documents that we are considering are clearly separate. One deals with subsidies for infrastructure and the other with aids for transport. We should separate the two in our minds, although the Opposition have not quite done so. The infrastructure problem has been there ever since we joined the Community in 1973. If we do not consider it carefully, it could be as big a financial disaster as the common agricultural policy.

I have not heard the peripheral regions of Europe mentioned, but those are the areas where there is great need for infrastructure. When I was a Member of the European Parliament we drew up a document dealing with the bridges and tunnels of Europe. Achieving a mere tenth of its proposals would involve the most enormous budget. Infrastructures are most needed in places such as Sicily in southern Italy and Greece. Portugal is another. Their infrastructure cannot possibly be compared to ours.

If the Government support the proposal, they must be prepared to make considerable injections of money, to pay for infrastructure, decided at the whim of the Commissioners, who represent countries where the infrastructure is poor. If we are to have a Messina bridge and all the tunnels that are needed throughout the Community, we are talking about billions of ecu. We cannot write a blank cheque for infrastructure.

Transport, whether by road, rail or air, is essential in the modern Community, but once again the costs are horrendous. If we are to subsidise everyone who applies to Brussels for an aviation link or help with a transport project, a blank cheque will be required. It is possible to think European by thinking like a Sicilian, Italian or Greek. That is what they want. It is why they joined. They want the wealthier countries to support their infrastructure. Ports, airports and motorways enable them to get their goods to the heart of the Community market. They are vital to them, but they are not quite so vital to us.

We have immense trouble with the common agricultural policy, but we might have a burden which is almost sufficient to break the Community budget's back. That is not what the Commissioners want. They mention the fact, as a sop to us, that there is the European Investment Bank, but it was around when Anthony Crosland was Secretary of State for Transport. It was prepared to hand over 200 million ecu to start off the Channel tunnel. Now, that sum would not build the first two or three miles.

The Opposition are opposing for the wrong reasons. They must ask themselves whether they want the United Kingdom, France and Germany to bear another heavy burden. The proposals would represent a colossal burden for countries with good infrastructure. My hon. Friend the Minister is right. Moves forward must be hesitant, careful and silent because, at the slightest sign of our being ready to agree to this enormous budget, we will land the wealthier nations with a colossal bill.

10.38 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) has just treated us to an extraordinary speech, and one which I did not expect to hear. He said, with enormous complacency, that all the problems are abroad. One wonders whether he has ever driven on one of our motorways or seen passengers in second-class InterCity carriages sitting on the floor because there are not enough seats.

The hon. Gentleman's view is extraordinary, especially to people in my part of the country, which many people regard as a peripheral area of the European Community. It has suffered from lack of investment and it suffers from lack of infrastructure as a result of the policies of a Government who are not prepared to invest.

I welcome the EEC initiative to extend the period during which member states are allowed to give aid to develop good transport infrastructure because we need it. I regret that while the Government welcome the aim of developing a Community-wide transport policy they have not seen fit to seize the opportunity for the benefit of this country's infrastructure. Moreover, if the hon. Gentleman is to be believed, they do not even see the need to seize the opportunity.

I have argued that we need an integrated transport strategy for Britain. As our roads clog up, the Government's policies stall. Their attitude could not be better summed up than in the letter of 2 September 1986 in which the Government

> "informed the Commission services that no aids are granted to promote combined Transport in the United Kingdom."

Just what we have always said. That is the Government's position. They spell it out for us. That lack of action is typical of a Government who are all too willing to shed large crocodile tears over the transport difficulties of ordinary men and women as they attempt to travel without providing the necessary financial handkerchief to mop up the resulting puddle. The attitude is typified by the lack of any major transport legislation this Session, despite the growing public concern about the huge traffic jams on our

[Mr. Matthew Taylor]

roads, an M25 which has been stalled from the day it was opened, crowded airways and a public transport network so overcrowded in some areas that it presents a threat to safety.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: What sort of legislation does the hon. Gentleman have in mind? Is he proposing that we should get rid of the statutory processes? He talked about the M25 being stalled from the day it was opened. Is he aware that vehicles travel 6,000 million kms a year on it?

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Very slowly.

Mr. Taylor: Yes, very slowly. That reminds me of the advertisement for the Vauxhall Nova where a car drives on the roofs of others. Perhaps that will be the solution.

The crocodile tears for transport bear a striking resemblance to the equally large tears that the Government shed over the environment and their failure to introduce legislation to improve the position. The two issues are connected because part of what the EC presents through these documents is precisely the means to tackle many of the environmental problems that people face in their everyday lives.

As the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) said, our European partners, notably France, West Germany, Belgium and Denmark, have seized the ability to grant aid to develop their infrastructure. In particular, they have improved terminals to facilitate rail freight. It is a shame that the British Government have to be dragged kicking and screaming to make the kind of investment that our people cry out for.

The Government claim that

"freight transport should operate on a commercial basis without subsidy."

Freight already receives a subsidy as road building is undertaken by taxpayers. Only this month the Department of Transport announced that more than £4 billion will be spent on main roads over the next three years. I have got that wrong: the Government "invest" in road building and "subsidise" railways. What a difference in attitude.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Talk about the Community."] I am talking about the Government's attitude to the motion on these EC documents and the opportunities that they present.

The Government claim that if there were sufficient demand

"private funds would be available to meet infrastructure costs."

Would those funds be sufficient to meet the other costs associated with road usage? In Spain, which is often cited as a private road paradise, the accident rate on parallel public roads has increased enormously and Spanish transport officials admit that the scheme is "utterly disastrous". Is that the kind of paradise that the Minister envisages for us or does he hope to eliminate accidents altogether by binding up the road system so much that nothing is moving and nobody is in any danger of being run over?

The Government seem to imply that only direct financial implications are important, but surely a wider perspective is called for and Europe offers us that. This so-called Green Government, as chief defenders of environmental protection, must surely be aware of the environmental hazards of heavy lorries with their noise pollution, and the destruction of areas of special scientific interest as a result of road building. The Government, as so-called chief defenders of the National Health Service, must surely be aware of the £2·8 billion spent by it in 1985 as a result of road accidents. I know that the Minister is aware of that as I have heard him talk about it. That is the cost of too many wasteful, tragic experiences for too many families in Britain and it could be avoided. The Government, as so-called chief defenders of the economy —no doubt we shall hear more about that tomorrow—must surely be aware of the estimate by John Banham, the director-general of the CBI, that £5 billion is being poured down the drain in congestion costs.

The EC legislation, 1992 and the opening of the Channel tunnel provide a unique opportunity to integrate and streamline our transport operation with the rest of Europe.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does the hon. Gentleman want to integrate Common Market heavy lorry standards by increasing the size of our juggernauts to 44 tonnes and allowing bigger, more intrusive lorries on our roads, or does he favour only a partial integration excluding juggernauts?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands the context in which I used the word "integration". I am talking about integration of transport in terms of road, rail and air. Taking vehicles off the roads would tackle precisely the difficulties that the hon. Gentleman raises. I am sure that he would welcome such a policy.

Combined transport, particularly where it reduces congestion, increases road safety, conserves energy and allows better use of existing rail capacity, is an opportunity provided by the documents that we are debating. People in many areas throughout the country are concerned that the benefits that the Channel tunnel can bring will be felt only in the south-east where many people fear the prospect of too much growth and too much congestion. The Government plan to construct a link that will certainly leave out areas such as my constituency. Without electrification through Exeter, Plymouth and Penzance, Britain's premier tourist area will be cut off from one of Britain's premier tourist routes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Looking at article 3 on page 4, I do not see any of the European Communities generalised list coming anywhere near the premier tourist resorts of England. Perhaps we are talking about different proposals.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Just to stick the boot in twice, my point is very much the same. I hope that the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) will join me at least in criticising the Commission whose view of Britain encompasses the land that lies between Dover and London. There is no mention whatsoever of any investment outside the south-east. The hon. Gentleman and I are on similar ground in that we want investment into what the Government regard as peripheral areas. I live in such an area and I know that they are not peripheral but the Commission mentions nothing about that.

Mr. Taylor: I am not suggesting that the Commission is adequate, but it is moving in the right direction. The Government's response is to write out any concept of integrated strategy for public transport which is the first prerequisite for tackling the problems that we agree exist.

It is simply not enough for the Government to encourage private finance and abdicate responsibility for the rest of the infrastructure. That is the option that the Government put forward. They say that private sector finance is fine, but what the public sector could do to solve the problems is written out of the agenda altogether.

The EC initiative concerns an integrated transport strategy. It recognises the role of the public sector in providing safe, reliable, cheap and efficient transport. It points to the environmental advantages of such a strategy. Because of those things, it comes as no surprise that the Government have proposed the motion to reject them. I hope that the House will not follow that example and will oppose the motion as a short-sighted, mean-spirited response to the opportunity that Europe's attitude to transport begins to present.

10.50 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): I hope that the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) will forgive me if I do not follow his argument. I do not feel that anything he said had any relevance to the documents before the House and I suspect that the series of disjointed cliches that he offered to the House owed more to an overpaid research assistant than to any relevance to the debate.

I should like to direct my remarks to the important major proposal by the European Commission for a major new fund for infrastructure investment throughout the European Community. The fact that no price has been put on it is alarming considering the past experience of the Community. An unlimited fund is proposed to spend on projects that the European Community deems to be in the interests of the Community as a whole.

It is strange that the proposal is being opposed by the Government—an opposition I warmly support—yet the Labour party, which is usually in opposition to the Community, is supporting an open-ended commitment to spending without limit. Whatever tortuous arguments the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) may advance, the fact remains that he and his colleagues are supporting a major Euro-project which involves itself in the United Kingdom's spending plans. It offers a blank cheque to the Community to increase spending throughout.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman obviously was not listening. I made it clear that because of the incompetence of the infrastructure programme and its unacceptability to most of the nation, certainly those outside the south-east, we could not support the infrastructure scheme. However, I pointed out that there are two documents under consideration.

Mr. Moate: Therefore, the hon. Gentleman will support the Government on the infrastructure proposal. —*[Interruption.]* I am sorry to pursue the point but I want to be clear that the Opposition will not oppose us in the Lobby tonight.

Mr. Lloyd: We will.

Mr. Moate: At last we have clarification. I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman will not vote against the Government.

Mr. Lloyd: We will vote against the Government.

Mr. Moate: This is very difficult. The Opposition will vote against the Government in support of Community spending even though they are against it. That is wonderful. The position is clear if one can have clarity from such a dense fog.

In fact, things are even more ironic. I must now cause a little less pleasure on the Government Front Bench. Whatever the House does will have little relevance. My hon. Friend the Minister was sanguine about the prospects of defeating the proposal in the Council of Ministers. I have heard suggestions that we will lose in the Council of Ministers and that there could be a majority in favour of the new infrastructure fund. I hope that I am wrong and that my hon. Friend is right, but neither of us knows. It could be that the House, led by the Government, will defeat the proposal. I am not sure whether the Opposition are for or against the measure but they intend to vote against it and could well win the day because it may be passed in the Community. Therefore, whether we like it or not, we might have forced upon us the new infrastructure fund for investing in major British transport projects.

Mr. Lloyd: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would care to remind hon. Members which side of the House voted in favour of the qualified majority system of voting in the Community.

Mr. Moate: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that he and I would be in total agreement that we should never have a majority voting factor in constitutional arrangements. However, he is not making it any easier for us by supporting the proposal against the Government. If he is against the proposal, why does he not add his voice by saying that he supports the Government's position?

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It might make all the difference.

Mr. Moate: Yes, and perhaps we can persuade Opposition Members to join us tonight in voting down this proposal.

Of course, none of us is satisfied with the current rail and road systems in this country, least of all, I suspect, my hon. Friend the Minister. We acknowledge that there is a vast amount to be done and we are all striving to do more. The answer does not lie in securing a small handout for projects that probably will not rate high in our priorities.

Leaving aside arguments about the theology of the European Community, surely any prosperous nation such as ours, the Germans and the French, should not look to the European Community to determine the quality of our roads or when and where we should find the investment and resources to develop our road and rail systems. If we were discussing a Third world country, a poor nation or an aid programme, the proposal might be logical, but we are not. Any argument about whether more funds should be directed to motorways or how those funds should be raised is one for the United Kingdom. We do not need the European Community to tell us how we should order our priorities. All that has nothing to do with whether one passionately believes in the European Community. The road programmes of the member states should be determined by their Governments.

The arguments across the House or with Ministers about whose roads should be highest in the order or priorities are for us to determine. Having sorted out our priorities, it would be a nonsense if the Community came along with our money, not the Community's, and said that another project should receive priority. That would be

[Mr. Moate]

fundamentally wrong. The Government are right to oppose that concept, and I hope that they will carry the day.

If the proposal goes through, who knows where it will end? There is no limit on expenditure. Where does that leave a Conservative Government or, perish the thought, even a Labour Government in determining priorities for transport spending? I do not believe that Opposition Members, any more than I, want those priorities to be determined elsewhere.

Mr. Hill: Turkey has applied to join the European Community. I wonder what the costs of its infrastructure would be if the Commission wanted to help Turkey.

Mr. Moate: My hon. Friend is emphasising the tremendous danger of passing such a resolution. Indeed, we face danger whatever we do tonight. If the proposal is carried in the Commission by majority vote, we shall face that danger. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will find a solution to that difficult problem.

There is agreement across the House that we object to the fact that it is a Commission-produced proposal. It is extraordinary that a motion opposed by the British Government and, I understand, many other Governments of the member states is before us simply because it has been produced by the Commission. In all the years of debate about the European Community, I have never understood how we came to accept a constitutional arrangement whereby major policy proposals are produced by unelected civil servants. Tonight we have a classic example of how, time and again, matters come before us that are not Community proposals and that have not been produced by democratically elected Governments. Indeed, they have been opposed by many member states. Can we have some sanity in all this? Will my right hon. Friends propose some amendment to this extraordinary constitution so that the Commission stops producing material that only causes major disturbances within the Community?

One project that has any relevance to this country is the link which, presumably, involves the Channel tunnel and London. Here we have a project that the Government are quite clearly stating is to be financed by the private sector. I accept that Opposition Members might have different views about how the Channel tunnel should be financed. Nevertheless, the House of Commons and the country are determined that, if there is to be a Channel tunnel, it is to be financed by the private sector. But here we have a proposal that suggests that the European Commission would use British funds—funds that would come from this country—in one way or another to subsidise the privately financed Channel tunnel project. Whichever way we look at it, that makes a nonsense of that proposal.

Conservative Members surely cannot accept that there will be a breach of the fundamental promise that it will not involve public funds. This proposal would involve public funds. If it is to be a privately financed, private risk project, how on earth can Opposition Members accept that there will be a subsidy from public funds to bail out private investors? In terms, it is nonsense, and I cannot see how they can accept it.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The hon. Gentleman does not appear to be aware that, even under the present proposals—quite apart from the proposal for the new transport fund, which we oppose also—there can be a claim by the Government for infrastructure expenditure as assistance in the Channel tunnel development, and the Government are actually claiming it. The money that is given by Britain to the Community, even under the old system, will be used to subsidise some of the investment in the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Moate: Again, the hon. Gentleman said that he is opposed to the infrastructure fund, but I remind him that he will vote in favour of it tonight.

Mr. Prescott: No.

Mr. Moate: Then Opposition Members must not vote against the Government in the Lobbies tonight.

Mr. Prescott: There are two documents.

Mr. Moate: I know, but there is to be one vote.

I return to the fundamental point that, according to the treaty and every promise that has been made to the country and to the House, public sector funds will not be involved in the Channel tunnel project. The measure is in direct conflict with that, and, therefore, I cannot see how on earth the House can approve it. On all counts, my hon. Friends have got this matter right tonight. We must strongly opposes the proposals here and in Brussels.

11.3 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): The hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) has been having some fun at the expense of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) on how the Opposition will vote at the end of the debate. The hon. Gentleman has been in the House long enough and has taken part in a sufficient number of EEC debates to know that the Opposition's problem is that the Government have grouped the two documents in one motion. Therefore, there is no opportunity for any Opposition Member or any other hon. Member to express a separate opinion on either document. If Opposition Members want to vote in favour of one document and against the other document, they have only one opportunity. That may be interpreted by the hon. Gentleman as voting for both documents. I am fairly certain that he accepts that my hon. Friends have made the Opposition's position absolutely clear. We shall vote against the infrastructure document and vote in favour of the integrated transport document. It is as simple as that, and the hon. Gentleman accepts it.

It is unfortunate that Scottish National party Members are not present. I do not intentionally attack them, because I did not give them notice that I would mention them in the debate. Recently there has been some debate in Scotland about Scotland being independent in Europe. It seems that Scottish Nationalist Members are in favour of a Scotland independent in Europe when they are discussing it with Kirsty Wark on "Left, Right and Centre" on BBC Scotland, or with Colin McKay on STV—

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): And Margo McDonald.

Mr. Ewing: And Margo McDonald, as my hon. Friend said—but not when we debate the issue at five past 11 on a Monday night. This matter is important to Scotland and its economy and in 1992 the transport system will be absolutely vital to what the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) called a peripheral nation, although he did not mention Scotland.

The Minister made a throw-away remark and I want to make sure that he did not mean what he said. He said that there is no place for a subsidy in transport policy. A subsidy operates in the distant islands of Scotland because there is no way that Orkney and Shetland and the Western Isles—the outer isles of Scotland—could transport goods from or to the mainland without the subsidy that has been paid by successive Governments for many years. I hope that the Minister was not giving a broad hint that the subsidy is to be terminated, because if that happened it would be disastrous for the distant islands of Scotland.

The hon. Member for Faversham put his finger on the central issue of the debate. I share the hon. Gentleman's opposition to proposals which come from an unelected Commission and not from Ministers. If the proposals are carried by a majority vote, what will be the Government's position? Will they say that because they voted against the proposals they will not use the provisions in them? That would certainly put Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom at a serious disadvantage.

We can clearly see from the document dealing with transport policy that since the provisions were introduced the French Government have made extensive use of the provision for transport policy, specially in relation to SNCF and two of its subsidiary companies. As a result of the provisions they have obtained substantial funds to develop not only import and container terminal systems, but what the document calls a piggy-back system linking ports and container terminal systems with other centres throughout France.

If I were in the French Government I would vote against the continuation of these policies because France has finished its programme. That puts France at a distinct advantage, particularly as we approach 1992. That is why the French Government have decided that the veto is no longer necessary. They have got everything that they want from the programmes and may well try to make sure that the rest of Europe does not get what it wants and needs.

The relationship between road haulage and the port industry in Scotland is worrying. About 10 years ago 75 per cent. of the goods that were manufactured in Scotland for export went out from Scottish ports. Now only 20 per cent. of those goods go out from Scottish ports and the reason for that is quite simple. The ship owners, the barons who own the vessels, are paying the road haulage costs. For example, the ship owner pays the road haulage costs for Dewar's whisky going by road from Perth to the non-scheme port at Felixstowe. That is because it is much cheaper for the ship owner to pay the road haulage costs than to pay the steaming costs of the vessel that would go to Grangemouth in my constituency where these goods could be loaded.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Surely the hon. Gentleman has just put forward the most eloquent case for the abolition of the dock labour scheme.

Mr. Ewing: This has absolutely nothing to do with the dock labour scheme. It is obvious that 11.10 pm is a bit late for the hon. Gentleman. If he comes back at 4 pm tomorrow, his thinking may be clearer and we can then have a discussion about the dock labour scheme.

This has everything to do with ship owners wanting to pay the road haulage because it is cheaper. It has nothing to do with exporting the goods from Grangemouth or Felixstowe. It is cheaper to pay the road haulage costs rather than to steam a vessel up to Grangemouth, Leith, Perth or any of the other ports that are at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the United Kingdom ports.

It is obvious that the ship owners will close most, if not all, of the Scottish ports. Once that has happened they will stop paying the road haulage costs and Scottish exports will, once more, be at a serious disadvantage.

If the proposals are carried by a majority in the EEC, the Minister is under an obligation to make the best possible use for them, especially in terms of an integrated Scottish transport system.

I have already referred to the absence of SNP Members for this debate. This issue is crucial to the Scottish economy, and I hope that the Minister will deal with the points I have raised.

11.11 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I applaud the fact that tonight our Government will resist the creation of another European fund. I sincerely hope that our Government will persuade the other European nations of the importance of getting the benefits from Europe by developing its markets and that those benefits cannot come from the creation of structural funds. The more important thing to do is to create the prosperity for individual nations to build their own roads, airports, ports or whatever.

Mr. Meale: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gill: No.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) made a valuable contribution. He implied that the structural funds are a lottery. All hon. Members know that that is true. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that, as a result of the new fund, a bridge may be built over the straits of Messina.

How will the car manufacturer in Cowley feel when taxpayers' money paid into a European fund means that roads will be built from Catania to Calais to speed the passage of cabbages, when manufactured cars cannot get from Cowley to Southampton port?

Mr. Prescott: Why is that?

Mr. Gill: Because where and how the money in the European fund is spent is a lottery. We should be concerned about that.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gill: No. I have a short and important message to give, and I crave the indulgence of the House to pass it on.

Although hon. Members may argue about it, they know that it is a lottery and there is no guarantee that we will get the projects that we want. The majority of applications for grant-aid in relation to the Channel tunnel have come from regions other than the south-east. Most of the cash allocated by the European Commission—no less than £9 million out of the total of £13 million—has gone to the south-east. That is not what this country wanted. That has occurred as a result of the lottery in Brussels.

Mr. Meale: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gill: No, I shall not give way.

These funds are a roundabout. There is a grand illusion among many politicians and members of the public that some projects in this country could not, and would not, be undertaken were it not for European money. That is a grand illusion, because the money is being taken out of our pockets and remitted to our local tax offices, which send it to the Treasury, which in turn sends it to Brussels, where the big shuffle starts. We all become involved in supporting our local councils and industries in an attempt to regain that money.

Mr. Meale: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gill: I have told the hon. Gentleman that I shall not give way.

Every time that I go home I am reminded of that fact because there, for all to see, is a sign that says, "This project would not have been possible without the European regional development fund." It is appropriate that a roundabout was funded in that project.

I shall end my speech now and give all those hon. Members who have attempted to intervene an opportunity to speak. I applaud most enthusiastically the Government's efforts to resist the creation of another structural fund—more power to their elbow in convincing other nations to do the same.

11.16 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Two issues appear to be at stake tonight: first, the concept of integrated transport systems; and, secondly, how these measures would be funded and would operate.

There are dangers in an open-ended commitment, but I note that negotiations are still taking place about finance and operation, and the proportion of funding. It is undesirable for the Commissioners rather than democratically elected and accountable representatives to decide those priorities. I find depressing the Government's mean-minded and narrow response to the proposal, and we should strongly oppose their response.

I am concerned that Europe, particularly western Europe, is well in advance of us in terms of infrastructure, investment and intergrated canal, rail and road links. We have such potential in this country. For example, in Yorkshire, the canal network goes right to the industrial heartland and the wharf and rail links, and the barge interchanges, could be developed further, to the advantage of the whole region.

If the proposal is carried in Europe, I wonder whether the Government will be able to capitalise on it and obtain grant-aid for infrastructure. I note that, where the road infrastructure is overused, highly polluted, or presents particular problems, there would be justification for grant support. Roads such as the A1 and the M1, which have reached their design capacity and at certain times of the week are choked and clogged, need to be tackled. There is scope for extending the M11 up the east coast and across the Humber bridge to Teesside to take the pressure off those two roads and to assist the industrial development of that region.

I should also like to see a genuine integrated transport policy under which freight is moved by rail as far as possible and there are rail interchanges and a proper public transport sytem to serve people's needs. The present system is breaking down and degenerating. To suggest that the free market will solve those problems and invest in such infrastructure is nonsense. Deregulation has led to more route mileage for buses and a decline in the number of passengers carried by them. That is not a good example of the market meeting people's needs. Nor do I see the market making a massive investment in infrastructure.

There are specific problems, such as the Humber bridge. The bridge board is being blackmailed by the Government to urge it to increase its tolls, which are already deterring use of the bridge. That is holding back the economic development of the Humberside region, and that is the result of the free market philosophy. The Government do not understand that a little public investment will do much to encourage industry and development, and that is why I say that they are narrow minded and mean minded. They could have much more imagination. They could decide to have lorry routes with break-bulk depots to keep juggernauts out of small town centres. I saw recently in my town centre a juggernaut making a delivery to a working man's club. The enormous lorry was used to deliver two boxes of crisps.

Why not claim some grant for an investment in depots outside all major urban areas? After all, it may be that lorries will eventually meet EEC standards. We could control them by keeping them to designated lorry routes and requiring them to go to break-bulk centres where their loads would be transferred to smaller, lighter vehicles for final delivery. That system would lead to environmental advantage. It would lead also to the creation of jobs and make Britain a nicer place in which to live.

The Government lack the imagination to improve a degenerating transport system. I say to those who sneer at other countries' systems that Greece, for example, has a better bus service than Lincolnshire. We must deploy a great deal of investment, imagination and foresight to improve our transport system, and that is not forthcoming from the Government.

11.22 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): It is with a sense of relief that I hear that the Government are resisting the proposals that are set out in the Community documents. But will we be out-voted if there is majority voting when the issue arises on 8 or 9 December? If we are out-voted, the money will be made available. I want to know whether it will be made available in the United Kingdom in those circumstances. Nothing could be more ridiculous than to find ourselves with Parliament and the Government in unison in opposing these proposals, only to find that the level playing field that we have been seeking to achieve is undermined because all the money is spent by other member states. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will answer that question.

We are dealing with a regulation, not a directive. It is so open-ended in its characteristics that I am reminded of the common agricultural policy. Questions that go to the heart of the financing of the European Community invariably become tied up with regulations. There is not a sufficient degree of control and they find themselves within the function of the Commission. When that happens, we are opening another Pandora's box.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are discussing a proposal that would take away from each of the 12 national Governments the power to decide what to do with money. That is why I suspect that 11 member states, if not 12, will view it with almost as much disfavour as the House. If by any chance it were to be agreed, I am sure that the British Government would find that their application would be considered. There is no guarantee that we would secure a large proportion of the money that would be available or that much of it would go to the north or south-west of Britain. That is why many of us cannot understand the Opposition's promise to vote against taking note of the documents.

Mr. Cash: I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend make that point. I was also delighted by what was leaked in the papers today to the effect that the M40 will have three lanes. My constituents will be very interested in that.

I am delighted that the Minister and the Government have taken a robust position. They have the British Parliament behind them. If the Opposition decide to divide the House, they will demonstrate only that the British Parliament and the electorate agree, as usual, with the Government.

11.24 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Having listened to the hon. Members for Faversham (Mr. Moate) and for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), one has to ask which party guillotined the Single European Act through the House. Which party in government is represented on the Community's Council of Ministers? That representation does not come from Opposition Members. The Government agreed that there should be majority decision making by the Council of Ministers. Although this draft regulation may be initiated by the European Commission, it cannot be implemented until it receives the approval of the Council of Ministers, to which the Government subscribe. There can be no get—out on the question of responsibility.

The Government are hell-bent on getting into the single European market to exploit their ideological fantasies, but they say no to every other degree of Europeanisation, to social Europe and to regional aid. It ill-becomes a party which has complied with the common agricultural policy for all these years, a policy which takes up 76 per cent. of the EEC's budget, to turn round now and say no to infrastructure expenditure which might help regions represented by so many Opposition Members and, dare I say it, even some represented by Tory Members.

The hon. Member for Ludlow said that we should feel aggrieved that British taxpayers' money might be spent in Calabria and Sicily. Does he realise how aggrieved the taxpayers on Merseyside and the north-east feel when they find that tax reliefs go mainly to the richer people in the south-east of England? Does he not understand that they are aggrieved when they discover that their money is spent on the Channel tunnel, while no real effort is made to improve the infrastructure in their areas to allow them to reap the full rewards of our participation in the European Community?

Mr. Meale: Mansfield, like many other areas, might apply for assisted area status, but it might not be granted because the Government refuse to change the map. Areas are then told to apply to Europe and to campaign for funds such as those under discussion tonight. Perhaps the Minister should offer guarantees to Nottinghamshire councils which want to open a rail link from Nottingham to Worksop. Will the Minister give them some guidance, or are they wasting their time going to Europe if the Government, who have already refused help for the region once, refuse it again via the EEC?

Mr. Wareing: My hon. Friend will understand that the Government oppose the setting up of the infrastructure fund for any aid for the regions simply on ideological grounds.

There is one thing for which the Government can always be given credit. They never allow reality to get in the way of ideology. They are not willing to have a public expenditure programme. They say, "Leave it to private funding; leave it to the market." They want the people to be the servants of the market, rather than the other way round.

Nothing is more in need of transport harmony than the port system within the Community. Many European countries regard the ports, not as individual transport undertakings, but as part of their national infrastructure. That is why so many EEC countries subsidise the ports, and even cover the costs of dredging, navigation lighting and many other processes. France subsidises the port of Le Havre through zero VAT rating, and covers 80 per cent. of the capital cost of dredging the port. The subsidies are reflected in the lower port charges that they allow. A recent report from Touche Ross illustrated how advantageous it would be for British ports if they received the same degree of subsidy. According to the report, British port charges would be reduced by some 20 to 25 per cent. Instead, many of our imports and exports are trans-shipped through European ports.

Antwerp has become the third port of the United Kingdom, because 15 per cent. of our goods and 8 per cent. of our exports go through it. The Belgian Government are providing 60 per cent. of the funds—£35 million out of £53 million—for the building of a new container terminal at the port.

The Government are allowing our port authorities to go into the European Community naked in 1992. They are unwilling to compete. The Belgian Government plan expenditure of £1 billion on Zeebrugge over 20 years. Where is our Government's infrastructural policy for this country's ports?

My constituency has a major interest in the development of the port of Liverpool. According to a recent survey by a leading firm of stockbrokers, Rensburg, Liverpool is now one of the most stable and successful port operations in Europe, but it needs a tremendous amount of investment to enable it to become what it should be —a bridge for the future in the Community. It would be possible for the United Kingdom to be an Atlantic-Europe land bridge for trade from the Atlantic, provided that the investment was there.

Hon. Members are blaming the Commission, but, looking down the list of transport developments, we find them only in Greece, Spain, France and Italy. I blame the British Government. Europeans think that the British Government are cool towards Europe and that they want it all their way. After the Prime Minister made that speech in Bruges, could she have expected the Commission to believe that if it made proposals for the development of road links in the north of England—for example, the M57 to link up with Liverpool airport at Speke—the British Government would take them seriously? Her speech was silly and chauvinistic.

[Mr. Wareing]

Our rail and road networks need to be developed. The Government ought to abandon the ideological cul de sac into which they have led the British people and accept that in a single European market there cannot be majority voting only for the policies in which the British Government believe. Sometimes they will be beaten. I hope that they will be beaten on this issue. That is why I am glad that the Opposition will go into the Division Lobby tonight to vote against the motion.

11.36 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to catch your eye at this late stage in the debate. I shall be brief. I want to make only one simple point about the transport infrastructure document that relates to the integrated transport market in 1992.

It is important that there should be an integrated transport network in 1992 because of its effect on my constituency. I do not agree with the priorities that are set out in the document, but I understand the underlying concept. The only way in which Holyhead can take off is by the provision of an integrated transport network and an improved roads programme to link the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom with the continent of Europe.

Unemployment in Holyhead amounts to about 18 per cent., yet it is a pivotal gateway for the Irish Republic if it is to enter the European network. The concept is right. Therefore, I shall vote against the Government. If they are not prepared to give us the money to finance the infrastructure when the European Community is, I am bound to support its proposals.

11.37 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd: By leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I place on record the Opposition's condemnation of the Government who have linked two separate documents and who, by doing so, have caused so much confusion in the mind of the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate).

The Opposition oppose the Commission's infrastructure proposals. They will do nothing for the nation. However, we are unable to support the Government's dog-in-the-manger stand on integrated transport development aid. They have crassly turned their back on it. If the Minister is prepared to say that the Government intend to revise their policies, the Opposition will be prepared to revise their stand.

11.38 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley: By leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I say that I would not dream of doing what the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) suggests.

The whole House is looking forward to watching the Labour party, with the exception of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), going into the Division Lobby because they support giving power to the European Commission, uncontrolled by the Council of Ministers, to use generalised criteria and to pick from a generalised list, most of which will do the United Kingdom no good.

Labour Members spoke about integrated transport, but combined transport is really piggy-back services. Until we have smaller wheels on our trains, we are not likely to benefit much from that. Indeed, the Germans have said that they will no longer use it. *[Interruption.]* I should like to say how much we welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Stretford is still talking because we get a lot of interference from his hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott).

We also welcome the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), who spoke on behalf of the Social and Liberal Democratic party.

It is worth reading the report of the Scrutiny Committee which recommended that the two proposals should be taken together. When we put forward the explanatory memorandum in July—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Stretford appears to be saying that he has read the Scrutiny Committee's report, but that fact did not emerge from his speech. In the four months since I signed the explanatory memorandum on behalf of the Government, and since it came to the House in July, I do not think that I have received a single representation against it from the Labour party. I certainly have not received any such representations from the Social and Liberal Democratic party.

I advise the hon. Member for West Derby that, if he is to have any consistency, he must follow his line of argument and join the Government in the Division Lobby in voting against the proposal that the European Commission should have an unfettered power. If he votes with the Labour party, we shall not take his speeches seriously in future.

That is very different from the clear and straightforward speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate). As I said earlier, like him we welcome seeing what gaps and bottlenecks remain, but we do not need the European Community to take our money and spend it either on things that we do not regard as priorities or in areas that are not regarded as priorities by national Governments.

Mr. Wareing *rose*——

Mr. Bottomley: I shall not give way.

We shall see a great deal of unanimity—I hope that there will be near unanimity—among other countries. When the Council of Ministers meets and has to decide whether it will combine and give up its powers to the Commission, I am sure that most of them will say, "Not on your life." We should say the same in other areas, for example, when people talk about social space, because the biggest social space is self-determination, where possible. Even the national Governments who voted for the Single European Act do not want to give up their determined powers to vagueness, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) rightly pointed out.

Conservative Members are keen on infrastructure spending, which is beginning to grow. The hon. Member for Stretford does not think that we are building enough roads but most of them are being built in the Manchester and Stretford areas. If we go back to the days of the last Labour Government——

Mr. Prescott: There cannot have been many new roads if they are all in Manchester.

Mr. Bottomley: The hon. Member cannot keep his mouth shut for long. In fact, many hon. Members may remember the hon. Gentleman's new year resolution several years ago when he said that he would try not to shout so much. He was not very good at keeping his resolution that year, and he is not very good at it now.

The hon. Member for Truro, speaking on behalf of the Social and Liberal Democratic party, got himself in a slight muddle, and it is probably best to leave it at that——

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bottomley: It is no good the leader of the SDLP shaking his head because either he wrote the speech, in which case he knows what his hon. Friend said, or since he was not here and did not listen to it, he cannot know. Perhaps we could see his photogenic leadership take a form other than the hon. Gentleman nodding his head as if in support of what his hon. Friend said, because he did not say very much that was worthwhile.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) spoke about subsidies. No one wants to get rid of all subsidies. The reason for identifying subsidies is to see what is being paid for what instead of having generalised subsidies, which is, in effect, what Labour Members are asking us to support when they say that they will vote against the motion. The Government will be able to point to the Labour party's actions for many months and years to come. Opposition Members will regret their decisions of today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) talked about developing the markets of Europe. His was a good speech, and it was the right thing to say. That line should be followed by many more people. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) raised a specific point which I hope that I was able to answer satisfactorily.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) did not say much of relevance.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) was right to talk of the need to get the ports working properly. One reason why we think that the Government and certainly the European Commission should move away from deciding which ports is that the ports must build their futures on their own competitive advantages, most of which come from within themselves.

The hon. Member for West Derby talked about subsidies. Although many of us are delighted that the port of Liverpool is doing better, we should remember that £165 million of taxpayers' money has gone into Liverpool in the past 10 years. I do not think that many of us would like the Commission to do that in other areas for very long, for any form of transport.

I ask the House, including the Labour party, to support the motion and to reject the idea of giving up all power to the Commission.

Question put:——

The House divided: Ayes 218, Noes 144.

Division No. 2] **[11.44 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*

Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter

Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory
and Mr. Michael Fallon.

NOES

Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beggs, Roy
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Godman, Dr Norman A.

Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert

Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Steinberg, Gerry

Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7325/88 on transport infrastructure and 6047/88 on aids for transport; and endorses the Government's opposition both to the creation of a transport infrastructure spending instrument and to the extension of Regulation (EEC) No. 1107/70 to cover the granting of aids for certain transport operating costs.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That during the proceedings on the matter of the effects of the Queen's Speech on the people of Wales, the Welsh Grand Committee have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet, and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees), the second such sitting shall not commence before 4 pm nor continue after the Committee have considered the matter for 2 hours at the sitting.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

PETITIONS

Settle-Carlisle Railway

11.57 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I wish to present a petition from my constituents who are deeply concerned about the possible closure of the Settle-Carlisle line on economic, social and environmental grounds.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the Settle-Carlisle railway and the associated Blackburn-Hellifield railway will be retained as an integral part of the national railway network.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): I wish to present a petition, signed by 10,000 people, concerning the future of the Settle to Carlisle railway.

British Rail has applied to the Secretary of State for leave to close the line and the Government have shown their preference for selling it to the private sector.

The petitioners think that the line should remain part of the British Rail network. The line, notably the magnificent Ribblehead viaduct, lies partly within my constituency. The Government should take to heart the importance of securing the long-term future of the line, which stands alone in Britain in bringing together the magnificence of human engineering and some of the finest landscapes in the United Kingdom.

To lie upon the Table.

Cambridgeshire Structure Plan

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

11.58 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I am very grateful for the opportunity tonight to raise an important matter relating to Cambridgeshire.

We all appreciate the great movement of population which is taking place in our society and which has been happening for some years. Cambridgeshire is the fastest growing county in Britain. We have problems of success. There has been a remarkable growth of industry and commerce, particularly in high technology, in the county, for which we are very grateful and proud, and we have the finest agricultural land in the country. But it is important that, when Ministers are forming environmental policy, they appreciate the effect of all that upon human beings. The Secretary of State must also bear in mind the importance of his decisions on planning. If he makes a mistake the environment can be ruined for ever. For example, the Greater London area and Middlesex suffered as a result of ribbon development between the wars.

My hon. Friend the Minister is always under pressure from amenity groups and residents directly affected but it will not do to say NIMBY—not in my backyard—to justifiably worried house owners and residents. The Minister will also be under possibly stronger and more stealthy pressure from developers and he must be strong enough to resist that. Recently, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has gained a reputation for being the slave of developers and a soft touch when cases go to appeal. That is unfair but he should bear it in mind.

The object of structure plans is to take into account local need, concerns and interests. The Government should give proper weight to local opinion. I shall refer to the Minister's proposed modifications to the Cambridgeshire structure plan. The modifications are illogical and fail lamentably to meet local or national needs. I shall outline some of the objections in brief.

My hon. Friend the Minister's proposals amount to a vast new settlement to the west of Cambridge involving out-of-town shopping. The result will be a new town of 14,000 people, which is equivalent to Huntingdon or St. Ives in the county. That is sheer madness. The object of fresh development, as the Department of the Environment and everyone else agrees, is to provide housing and employment opportunities for the north of Cambridgeshire. The west development will merely attract yet more commuters working in London. I have nothing against people living in Cambridge and working in London because, after all, that is what I do. However, it is contrary to the strategy that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wants. It will do nothing to ease the problems of people working in and around Cambridge, especially to the north in the Fens which is where the problem really lies. By contrast, the panel advising the Minister supports the view that development to the south of Cambridge should be restrained. Paradoxically, that will be the effect if the modifications are confirmed.

The roads of Cambridgeshire are very dangerous. The A45 to the west is as dangerous as any. There have been many horrific accidents and crashes there during the time that I have been a Member of Parliament for the area. A new vast development such as that proposed could only make matters worse and increase the sum of human misery. That will be exacerbated particularly as commercial travel increases in 1992 and vehicles seek to gain access to the M11.

The important regeneration of the villages of Papworth Everard and Caldecote, where new housing is already under construction or planned, will be threatened by the new development. I am informed that in the village of Bourn there are drainage problems and that flooding could occur in Bourn Brook as a result of the development. That is according to the most recent information from the Anglian water authority. To add to all that, three sites of special scientific interest would be damaged.

Those arguments and many more are set out in more detail in the response sent to my right hon. Friend by the new settlement action group involving 14 villages. I beg the Government to study the response with great care. The important point is that there has been no consultation or opportunity for anyone to consider the vast new alteration and all its implications. That is contrary to my idea of local democracy and the freedom to which the Government subscribe.

The proposal for the huge new settlement on the A45 west of Cambridge can be summed up by saying that it is incompatible with the strategy accepted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his Department. It will be devastating to the amenities of the existing population. It will increase the danger to life and limb, to say nothing of congestion on the A45. It will do nothing to meet the new housing demand generated from the Cambridge area and there has been no opportunity for those affected to make their case. In short, the proposal is stark, staring crazy.

I shall not be merely negative tonight, strong though my arguments are. I recognise the need for housing in the county and I believe that there is a solution. Development to the east of the A45—and I have in mind a site near Nine Mile hill—would conform to the strategy. Employment opportunities are to be found to the east of Cambridge, not to the west. All roads out of Cambridge are operating to full capacity except the 1303 leading east. The area to the west is more costly than the east for services and education needs can also be more easily met.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): As my hon. Friend knows, Nine Mile hill is in my constituency. Does he agree that already a large number of people commute to Cambridge from further north and the Fens? The Fenland district has been allocated only 7,150 houses under the Secretary of State's proposals, although it wants 10,000. Would it not be more sensible to push the proposed development a little further north into the Fens, where it is wanted by the local councils and where the prosperity that it would bring is needed?

Sir Anthony Grant: It is quite true that that would be another alternative. Indeed, a development to the north would be exactly the same distance away from Cambridge as a development to the west. It was included in the original structure plan, which took two years of consultation and deliberation to develop. The whole point was muddled by the panel that has reported to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. It is certainly an alternative to the current unsatisfactory proposal.

Not only do I and my hon. Friend vehemently oppose the proposed scheme but the 14 villages immediately

[Sir Anthony Grant]

affected and the whole of the Cambridgeshire county council, Conservatives, Labour and Democrats, are opposed to the proposal.

The whole planning problem is nationwide, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows from the strong representations from my hon. Friends. I am a strong supporter of the Government and I have been a Member of Parliament for many years. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister cannot give any answers tonight, but I want him, my right hon. Friend and the Government to be under no illusions. They are sitting on a keg of dynamite throughout the south and east of our nation, which will explode with devastating results unless the Government heed the wishes of the people they serve. I pray that Ministers will heed my words tonight and think again on the subject of Cambridgeshire.

12.8 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) for the helpful and constructive way in which, as always, he deployed his arguments. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice), whose contribution was a gloss on my hon. Friend's speech. The fact that they were not ad idem shows the problems that the Government face in solving difficult planning issues.

This is a one-sided debate in two senses. First, all speakers are on the Conservative Benches, although that is not unusual. Secondly, I cannot tonight answer the points that have been raised. All that I can do is assure my hon. Friends that their submissions and arguments will be taken into account as relevant evidence on the structure plan proposed modifications. I congratulate my hon. Friends on their excellent timing. Ministers will be considering responses to the recent consultation within the next few weeks.

Perhaps in the time available I might briefly remind the House of how the structure plan process operates. It is a long and often painstaking process, but it is designed to produce the right conclusion, and certainly to enable everybody to put their point of view and to have it properly considered.

Structure plans provide the necessary framework for development control and the co-ordination and direction of development. They give a general indication of where development should be located and its size. The end product of the development plan process should be a clear and concise statement of policies and proposals for development which strike a satisfactory balance in land use between immediate availability for development, provision for future contingencies, and conservation. It is essential that the policies contained in an approved plan are closely monitored and kept up to date to cater for the needs of the county.

The existing Cambridgeshire structure plan was approved in 1980. Since then, Cambridgeshire has had to face several significant changes. They are: increasing pressure for more new housing, especially in the Cambridge area and the Huntingdonshire towns and villages of the Ouse valley; the expansion of Stansted airport; the growth of high technology industries in the Cambridge area; and major changes in transport, such as the completion of the M11 and the A45 Cambridge northern bypass.

To respond to those challenges, the county council submitted proposals for a replacement plan. An examination in public was held in October 1987. That process involved people being able to put their views to a public inquiry. The panel's report was presented to the Secretary of State in January 1988.

As my hon. Friends will know, the Secretary of State announced proposed modifications to the plan in July 1988. Those modifications were the subject of consultation. The consultation period was originally to expire at the end of September, but, because of the postal dispute, it was extended until the end of October. As I have said, the points that have been raised tonight will count as points raised in the consultation.

We hope that, by the beginning of next year—probably in January—it will be possible to come forward with our conclusions on what is obviously a difficult issue, as such planning issues normally are.

Sir Antony Buck (Colchester, North): I have a loose connection with the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) has made a devastating case. Will my hon. Friend the Minister assure the House that what has been said this evening will be taken fully into consideration when the report is finally made?

Mr. Chope: I am able to give an unequivocal assurance that everything that has been said this evening will be taken into account as evidence in the case. That does not mean that, when the conclusions are announced, they will necessarily be word for word what my hon. Friends wish to hear. Obviously, I cannot prejudge the matter. I am at great pains this evening not to say anything that could be taken to demonstrate that we have already reached a conclusion on any of the issues.

This has been a well-timed debate. My hon. Friends have been able to make their points, and they will be taken fully into account. I cannot say more than that. Obviously, the points having been made in such a way, they will carry considerable weight.

The problems of reconciling the need to increase the number of houses in Cambridgeshire with the problems of where to locate them are not easily resolved. We shall have to reach a final conclusion over the next few weeks. It is as frustrating for me as it is for my hon. Friends to know that we cannot take the debate any further this evening, but I assure the House that we shall reach a decision as soon as possible.

Once again I congratulate my hon. Friend on initiating the debate and on getting the timing absolutely right. In his own inimitable style, he ensured that the arguments were cogently put.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 29 November 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (SPITALFIELDS MARKET) BILL

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *[Lords]*

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[Lords]*
Orders read for consideration of motions.
To be considered on Thursday at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Trident

1. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects the first Trident missile submarine to enter service with the Royal Navy.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Younger): As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said in this House on 20 October, we do not expect that there will be any slippage in the planned in-service date of Trident, which continues to be the mid-1990s.

Mr. Shepherd: Will my right hon. Friend accept from a former submariner that it is essential that the time scale is met, because old submarines not only become obsolete but wear out? Does my right hon. Friend agree that despite the encouraging changes on the other side of the Iron Curtain, any reduction in the perceived effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent will only hinder, not help those changes?

Mr. Younger: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. It is essential that as long as we must have the deterrent force it should be kept up to date. In view of the enormous developments taking place and the counter measures available to the Soviet Union, it is essential that the programme continues on time.

Mr. John Evans: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that the escalating cost of the Trident programme is seriously distorting his defence budget and making it increasingly difficult for him to fulfil our commitment to NATO conventional forces, especially the Royal Navy's surface fleet?

Mr. Younger: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman. First, the cost of Trident is not escalating, but de-escalating. In the last year's repricing there were real reductions of £376 million and a foreign exchange rate reduction of £258 million. That has meant a real reduction of nearly £2 billion since the programme was first announced. The hon. Gentleman's question does not have any teeth.

Sir Antony Buck: Does my right hon. Friend agree that what he has said shows that Trident is a good bargain for this country? Does he also agree that it is good that the fact that it is coming into operation is being discussed on the Floor of the House and that we are updating our nuclear deterrent openly? The Labour Government updated our nuclear deterrent by introducing Chevaline and not telling the House about it.

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The cost of the Trident programme works out over its life at about 3 per cent. of the total defence budget. In no other way could such a sum of money, spent on some other means, produce security the like of which the Trident programme will give us.

On the question of neglect of the conventional forces, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Sir A. Buck) knows, the Government's spending on conventional defences is £21 billion greater than it would have been if the previous Government's programme had continued.

Mr. Boyes: What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the implications for the United Kingdom Trident fleet of the verification arrangements of the United States and Soviet Union START agreement, considering that when Trident missiles are deployed with the British fleet the Soviet Union may wish to inspect British submarine facilities at Rosyth and Faslane? Will the Secretary of State allow that to happen, or is he prepared to sabotage the START agreement?

Mr. Younger: First, everyone on both sides—including Mr. Gorbachev—has made it clear that the British Trident system is not part of the START negotiations. Secondly, we have had clear assurances that any negotiations on START will affect neither the Trident programme itself nor any future testing thereof.

Merchant Ships

2. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the number of merchant ships available to him in an emergency.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): The number of vessels available on the United Kingdom and dependent territory registers at 30 September 1988 in the categories required for defence purposes was as follows:

	Number
Large stern trawlers	15
Other fishing vessels & offshore support vessels	333
Product tankers	126
Break bulk general cargo vessels	163
Large passenger liners	5
Roll on-roll off ferries	73
Tugs	91

Mr. McFall: Is the Minister aware that there is great concern about merchant shipping? Is he further aware that both the Defence and the Transport Select Committee have commented on the matter and that the Government have agreed with their analysis of vessel shortfall, the availability of categories of ships and the genuine availability of ships, whether through ownership, through routes or through crew availability?

Two questions arise——

Mr. Speaker: Order. One question.

Mr. McFall: Yes, one question in two parts. Which categories of ships still cause the Government concern in regard to requisitioning and genuine availability, and during which period of time will those ships be available?

Mr. Hamilton: The statistics that I have quoted are for readily available ships. It is assumed that they are either in British ports or nearby and can be requisitioned in a short time. We are concerned about large stern trawlers and have felt compelled to consider other types of vessels as auxiliary mine sweepers. The overall evidence is that the position has stabilised, and we do not expect it to become any worse.

Sir David Price: Does my hon. Friend agree that the question would be better phrased to embrace the whole of NATO availability of merchant ships? Is he aware that many of us are concerned that the problem mentioned by the hon. Friend for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) about the United Kingdom Merchant Navy applies to the whole of the NATO contribution to the merchant shipping section of the Alliance?

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend is right. We are concerned about what should be happening in NATO. Through a United Kingdom initiative, NATO has embarked on a study of both supply and demand, which we hope will enable us to assess the requirement accurately.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Minister recognise the valuable work done by the Merchant Navy in two world wars? Have the Government not responded disgracefully to seamen in the 1980s by running down the British fleet and allowing flagging out so that the ships are foreign run? What sort of justice is that for British seamen? When will the Government recognise that the merchant fleet is an important aspect of life in this country, both in peace and in war?

Mr. Hamilton: The Government fully recognise the great contribution of merchant seamen both during the war and after. However, we are dealing with shipping in the market place. If British ships with British crews cannot compete, they will have to look elsewhere.

Mr. Aitken: Is my hon. Friend not in some danger of being a little complacent in his answers, and not only in regard to the NATO sealift shortage of 150 ships? Does he recall that in 1939, prior to the last war, there were some 3,000 deep sea vessels, 2,600 of which were sunk during the hostilities? There are currently 600 deep sea vessels which, in terms of today's conventional weapons, would be unlikely to last more than a few weeks. Is there not a real need to think more widely and deeply about shortages that could arise in an emergency?

Mr. Hamilton: The Government are by no means complacent. We are at present negotiating agreements with major flag-of-convenience states to minimise any legal difficulties that might be experienced with the 200 vessels on their registers. We have developed machinery that can be activated at short notice to charter ships on the market. We have negotiated comprehensive arrangements for access to ships owned by our NATO allies.

NATO (Missile Flight Ban)

4. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has discussed with any of his North Atlantic Treaty Organisation colleagues the possibility of a missile flight ban.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United States continues to keep its allies fully informed about its bilateral negotiations with the Soviet Union in a possible START agreement. There has been no proposal for a missile flight test ban.

Mr. Davies: Does the Minister accept that the Government are being inconsistent in not pressing for a ban? Surely any improvement in ballistic missile technology will be an advantage to the side that strikes first, which is completely incompatible with the Government's overall view on strategy.

Mr. Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that Trident is a new system, and it is essential that it is tested to ensure that it operates properly. Unless we had that confidence, it would not be a deterrent.

Mr. Brazier: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the need for nuclear weapons, which includes the need for tested missiles to carry them, will remain as long as there is an overwhelming conventional advantage for the other side?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, that is right. It is important that we should be able to continue to test our systems and to ensure that they work properly.

Low-flying Aircraft

5. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received regarding the problem of low flying of Royal Air Force jets in the south-west of England.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Roger Freeman): The Ministry of Defence received 568 inquiries or complaints about low-flying jet aircraft from the south-west of England between 1 January and 31 October 1988.

Mr. Taylor: I am sure the Minister will agree that that is not an inconsiderable number and that low-level flying can cause considerable distress and inconvenience, especially to the farming community. Will he reassure the House that the Government are aware of that and are trying to keep flights to the minimum? May we also have an assurance that there are adequate safety arrangements for personnel and the local community?

Mr. Freeman: I agree that low-flying training is inconvenient. We try to spread the burden as widely as possible throughout the United Kingdom. We have a good working relationship with the National Farmers Union to cover claims from the farming community, and they are paid promptly. The farming community, like any other members of the public, should not be unduly worried about safety. The safety record of the Royal Air Force has improved consistently during the past 20 years.

Mr. Robert Hicks: Does my hon. Friend accept that the majority of people living in the south-west accept that this kind of training is essential for our pilots? However, does he agree that people who may have complaints about inconvenience are those living in distinctive geographical areas, such as the Tamar valley, where it appears that the incidents of low-level flying are greater than elsewhere?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support for the principle of low flying. I assure him that in his constituency—in the Tamar valley—he should see no more than his fair share of low-flying aircraft.

Royal Ordnance

6. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for the supply of defence materials of *(a)* the current and *(b)* planned regional distribution of production of defence materials by former Royal Ordnance plants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: We have assured the supply of appropriate defence materials by the five year agreement for the supply of ammunition that we concluded with Royal Ordnance in July of this year and by a number of other extant contracts. Royal Ordnance acknowledges that it remains committed to supply us in accordance with those arrangements. With that commitment, it would not be appropriate for the Government to seek to restrict the company in its search for greater efficiency and competitiveness, which are matters for the commercial judgment of the company.

Mr. Graham: As the Secretary of State is aware, British Aerospace intends to phase out and close Bishopton Royal Ordnance factory, with the loss of 1,100 jobs. We understand that it intends to transfer the work to Chile, Kentucky and other parts of America. Does the Secretary of State accept that the Bishopton Royal Ordnance factory is a major propellant producing factory in Britain? If we allow that firm to transfer its work abroad, in the event of a crisis Britain would not properly be able to defend itself because of the time scale in bringing back arms to this country.

Mr. Younger: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern. That it appears that this particular facility is to be closed by Royal Ordnance is a serious and difficult matter. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman about transferring production to other countries. As I understand it, no such decision has been taken. I urge the hon. Gentleman and his constituents to wait and see what plans British Aerospace produces. It has underlined that it will be as helpful as it can to existing employees.

Mr. Churchill: What obligations are there on Royal Ordnance to maintain a surge capability in the production of key categories of weaponry and munitions in the event of future hostilities?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate the point that my hon. Friend has made. As I have already said, the five-year agreement that we have concluded with Royal Ordnance obliges it to be able to supply us with what it has been contracted to supply in the next five years. That will give us plenty of time to decide what future contracts should be made, and with whom. An adequate supply of the necessary materials is available from a number of different sources.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Secretary of State make an urgent assessment of the implications of the possible non-production of defence equipment at former Royal Ordnance factories, especially in Leeds? If, as rumoured, the Government are to purchase the American-built main battle tank, does the right hon. Gentleman not realise that that will mean the loss of more than 20,000 jobs at Vickers and supplying companies, besides removing a main battle tank building capacity from this country? Why has the Cabinet delayed a decision on this important issue? Does it not know all the facts, or is the Secretary of State waiting to make an announcement on the day before the recess so that he will avoid political flack from Conservative Members who want his head?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman seems to assume one particular outcome. There have been rumours in all directions and I can confirm only that we are holding a competition—it is a good one—between the different types of tank. We have difficult choices to make. It is still my hope that we shall be able to make a decision before the end of the year. My colleagues and I will do our best to stick to that.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this reorganisation of production should lead to lower unit costs, better value for the taxpayer and greater job and export opportunities?

Mr. Younger: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is in everyone's interest that our defence industry, whether Royal Ordnance or any other part of it, should be as competitive as possible. All the signs are that moves in recent years to make it more competitive have resulted in record overseas sales of defence equipment and have secured a large number of jobs.

British Aerospace (Explosives and Propellants)

7. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with British Aerospace on collaborative production agreements with non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries in relation to explosives and propellants.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): None. The company has announced that it has signed joint-venture agreements with companies in the United States and Brazil, with a view to selling explosives and technology and thereby expanding its business in overseas markets.

Miss Lestor: I want to reconsider the hon. Gentleman's previous answer. If it is true that there is a five-year agreement with Royal Ordnance factories, presumably the equipment that it would no longer produce if its factories were closed would be bought from somewhere? As I understand it, the Minister has hinted that that equipment will come from Latin America and other countries. Bearing in mind that they are non-NATO countries, will he inform the House what guarantees he has that standards of manufacture, which have been an essential part of Royal Ordnance factory production, will be maintained? Presumably the jobs at those factories will be re-exported to non-NATO countries.

Mr. Sainsbury: I think that the hon. Lady is referring to the reply that my right hon. Friend, rather than myself, just gave, referring to the five-year agreement. Under that agreement Royal Ordnance has the responsibility to meet 80 per cent. of our requirement for certain specified explosives, propellants and related end products. It is, of course, for the company to organise its production facilities to meet that requirement as efficiently as possible. My right hon. Friend has already said that that is in the interests not only of MOD, but of the company.

I assure the hon. Lady that we have standard conditions of contract in those arrangements that will require the company to notify us of any intention to purchase more than £100,000 worth of goods from overseas. If any such request were received, we would look at it in the light of our strategic requirements, among other factors.

NATO (Short-Range Weaponry)

8. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the proposed modernisation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's short-range nuclear weaponry.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the communiqué issued after the nuclear planning group meeting in The Hague, Scheveningen, on 27-28 October. A copy of the communiqué has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Campbell: What weight does the Minister give to the views on this matter of our West German allies, who have an acute geographical interest in short-range nuclear weapons? Should we not delay modernisation until we are satisfied that it is necessary? Should we not press for a multilateral agreement, which will make modernisation unnecessary?

Mr. Hamilton: I do not accept the premise of that question. NATO is not divided on the fundamentals, that nuclear deterrents will be required for the foreseeable future and that nuclear forces must be effective and kept up to date. That was the position taken at the Scheveningen agreement.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that the modernisation of all weapons systems has to go on continually because it takes so long to take a system from the initial plan as to how we should defend ourselves through to producing a weapons system? Any delay in that process is likely to put us so far behind that we shall never be able to keep up our deterrent systems.

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is no point in having a nuclear deterrent if it becomes obsolete because it will deter no one.

Mr. Sean Hughes: A few weeks ago the Prime Minister declared in Washington that the cold war was over. Do the Government share the view expressed by the French Foreign Minister, that we should wait two or three years before modernisation to see what the Soviets decide to do?

Mr. Hamilton: The Government certainly do not follow that view. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the French are not military members of NATO.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend make it clear to the House that the Soviets are modernising their nuclear forces at theatre level, as well as at strategic level? Does he agree that it is vital for the Royal Air Force, which will have an important role in nuclear deterrence for many years, to be able not only to launch stand-off weapons but to have effective defence suppression systems, such as the ALARM missile? Can my hon. Friend tell the House whether progress has been made on ALARM?

Mr. Hamilton: The ALARM programme is progressing, although, as my hon. Friend knows, there have been difficulties with it. My hon. Friend is right about the Soviet Union, which takes the view that it should modernise its whole range of nuclear weapons. That is what we are doing as well. It is also worth bearing in mind that since 1979 about 35 per cent. of the nuclear warheads held by NATO in Europe have been unilaterally disbanded to reduce the number from 7,000 to 4,600.

Computer Systems

9. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to strengthen the security of sensitive defence computer systems.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes. For security reasons I am not prepared to disclose details.

Mr. Darling: Can the Minister tell us whether British defence computer systems have been interfered with? Can Britain's defence computer system be infiltrated as happened in the United States when computer hackers spread a virus in the system and so compromised defence? The Minister sounds a little complacent, as if he is seeking to hide behind a shroud of secrecy. Will he answer my question and give the House the assurances it needs?

Mr. Hamilton: There is no question of the Government hiding behind a shroud of secrecy. The fact is that we have no evidence that our highly classified system has been tampered with or that anybody has obtained access to it. Low-classified information is different because such computer systems are open to large numbers of people.

European Fighter Aircraft

10. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress with the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Sainsbury: The EFA main development contracts were signed on 23 November. That followed Spain's signature of the development memorandum of understanding earlier this month. These contracts will provide a very significant programme of work in the United Kingdom, particularly for British Aerospace and Rolls-Royce, and also for the aerospace industry as a whole.

Mr. Stern: Does my hon. Friend agree that the announcement is good news, not only for the workers at Rolls-Royce in my constituency and in that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Cope), but for the future of European co-operation on major defence projects? It is good news for everybody, yet the Opposition have been trying to put every obstacle and objection in the way since the project began.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. I know that he has followed the project closely and supported it on behalf of his constituents. As he said, the signing of the MOU is a good step forward for European defence equipment collaboration and builds on the successful Tornado programme.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Minister give us some assurance about collaboration on radar and tell us what is happening in relation to competition for that? May we have some assurances that the radar contract will be given to a British company such as Ferranti, and its group, which is needed to keep us in the forefront of R and D and is essential for the future of radar in European and world terms?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman is aware that there is a competitive selection process for the important radar contract. I suspect that he may also be aware that there are British companies in both the competing consortia. We are nearing the end of the competitive exercise and must now await the examination of the tenders before reaching a conclusion on which of those British companies will be successful.

Mr. Jack: On behalf of the aerospace workers in my constituency of Fylde, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on the successful conclusion of the EFA negotiations? Will he say a little more about the employment prospects created by the project and confirm that the United Kingdom Government could not participate in that project without the success of the British economy to fund it?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. I hope that his constituents are aware of the close interest that he takes and the support that he has given to this project, which gives considerable employment opportunities to his constituents who work for British Aerospace or for the numerous sub-contractors to the prime contractors, such as British Aerospace and Rolls-Royce.

Mr. O'Neill: Will the Minister accept the congratulations of both sides of the House on the completion of this stage of the EFA? We have consistently supported the programme and welcome the latest developments. However, I should like to pursue the Minister on the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) about radar, because one of the radar systems, the Ferranti system, is British designed and British led, whereas although the one led by AEG has Marconi participation, it is basically an adaptation of an American system.

Will the Minister assure us that the newspaper reports that have appeared in Scotland are not true and that a decision will not be taken until the middle of this month? Will he further assure us that he will announce the decision to the House as quickly as possible after it has been made by the appropriate partners?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the support for the project that he has expressed from the Opposition Front Bench. I hope that that will continue. This is an important project which is good for British industry and European collaboration. However, I must disappoint the hon. Gentleman by saying that I am not a regular reader of Scottish newspapers and regret that I have not seen the reports to which he referred. Therefore, I cannot add anything to what I said to his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) about awaiting the outcome of the competitive tendering.

Jamaica

11. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance has been given by his Department to Jamaica as a consequence of the recent hurricane.

Mr. Younger: British forces were the first outsiders on the scene to give practical assistance to Jamaica in the aftermath of hurricane Gilbert which struck the island on 12 September. HMS Active arrived to give assistance on 15 September, and the crews of Active and RFA Oakleaf spent six days in Jamaica providing food, medical relief, reconnaissance, temporary repairs to a number of hospitals, and the reconstruction of power lines. A detachment of the Royal Engineers from Belize arrived on 16 September and spent nearly three weeks working on emergency repairs, water and electricity supplies to a hospital and on major repairs to several children's homes. In addition, the RAF flew in two consignments of relief equipment, including much needed tents and blankets, using C130 Hercules aircraft.

Mr. Taylor: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that extremely positive reply and for his prompt response to that terrible natural tragedy. Can he give us some idea of the cost of those provisions to the island of Jamaica?

Mr. Younger: I thank my hon. Friend for what he has said and I shall see that that is passed on to all the service men who took part in the operation. The cost of the MOD contribution to the Jamaica disaster relief operation is roughly £100,000, but the bill will be met by the Overseas Development Administration, not by the MOD.

Mrs. Mahon: Is the Minister prepared to give the same assistance to Nicaragua? Recently, we heard on the world service that there had been a major ecological—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Unfortunately, the question is about Jamaica.

Procurement Budget

12. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he proposes taking to ensure that a greater proportion of his Department's procurement budget is secured from Wales.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is our policy to place equipment orders, wherever practicable, by competitive tendering. In 1986-87, about £150 million was paid to companies with a billing address in Wales. The future level of spending in Wales will be primarily determined by the enterprise and competitiveness of Welsh industry.

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady's question was not very sophisticated.

Mr. Wigley: The Minister spoke a moment ago about the employment opportunities that had arisen from defence contracts in one of his hon. Friend's constituencies. Does he realise that over half of defence procurement expenditure is in the south-east of England, compared with only 2 per cent. in Wales, and that that amounts to a covert regional policy? If it were possible to have only a per capita expenditure level in Wales, it would be the equivalent of £300 million additional expenditure in the Welsh economy and about 20,000 to 30,000 additional jobs. Will his Department please take a more active stance to try to encourage some diversification of job opportunities?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will encourage firms in Wales to bid for MOD business. We like to see as many firms as possible, including small firms, competing as main contractors and as sub-contractors. There is a problem with the figures to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It relates to information on the head office to which we send our cheque. The Ministry of Defence does not necessarily have information on where the product for which we pay is actually manufactured. I suspect that more work is done in Wales than is shown by the information on the location of the head office where we send the cheque for our supplies.

Relocation

13. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to relocate service establishments and personnel from the south to the north of Britain.

Mr. Freeman: We are anxious to see a more even spread of defence employment across the regions. We are currently examining a range of further relocation possibilities, but I remind my hon. Friend that any moves must be justified on operational and economic grounds.

Mr. Rathbone: As the services are recruiting a disproportionate number of personnel in the north and locating them disproportionately in the south, to the extent that 60 per cent. of service personnel are located in the south, would it make sense to post them in the north and, therefore, follow the Government's lead in urging industrial companies to establish employment opportunities in the north and thereby relieve pressure on housing in the south?

Mr. Freeman: I can give my hon. Friend some encouragement on that point. We have just completed a review of Royal Air Force ground training establishments, and we hope shortly to make an announcement.

We are studying the location of all Army training units. It will take a little longer, but the implications are more fundamental.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is it true that, although they support defence policies, people in the north are suffering because they do not have their share of jobs in the defence industry? Is it not about time that the CBI in the north and all regional promotional bodies in the north-west of England and the northern region went to the Government and demanded a fair share of the defence cake? At present, all the money goes to the south.

Mr. Freeman: Our best recruitment areas for service personnel are in the north-east and the north-west. To that extent, those areas have a disproportionate share of service personnel.

Mr. Hind: In the light of the announcement about European fighter aircraft, does my hon. Friend consider that the relocation of the Procurement Executive in the north of England would be appropriate, bearing in mind the amount of military equipment that is manufactured for our forces in the north of England?

Mr. Freeman: I can confirm that the Ministry of Defence is considering the relocation of certain parts of the Procurement Executive in the north of England.

Publicly Owned Land

15. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reconsider the way his Department places a valuation on publicly owned land to be disposed of.

Mr. Sainsbury: No. Before disposing of surplus property we obtain professional advice either from within the MOD, from the district valuer or from commercial consultants. They prepare valuations of surplus property on the basis of full open market value, taking account of existing or established uses and, when appropriate, development potential.

Mr. Turner: Does the Minister agree that Royal Ordnance land has been sold on the cheap and that public assets have been given away? It is an absolute scandal. In addition to the hundreds of millions of pounds that have been given away on the land, there has been cheating on the property rights, which have also been given away.

Mr. Sainsbury: I remind the hon. Gentleman that Royal Ordnance was sold as a company with all its obligations and all its assets. Furthermore, that sale was the result of a satisfactory competitive tendering process on the open market and the highest bidder succeeded in obtaining the company. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we obtained an open market value, including development potential, of the property about which he is expressing so much concern, and that the figures were extremely low —so low that we did not reveal them to the prospective purchasers because we thought that they would have a more optimistic assessment.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend consider the speed at which we can sell land and property which is empty, particularly in the south-east, and certainly in my constituency, because there is a housing crisis in that area and the MOD seems to be hanging on to rather a lot of land and property that could be better used in the private sector?

Mr. Sainsbury: I assure my hon. Friend that we in the MOD are extremely anxious to make the best use of land assets and, where land is surplus to requirements, to release it for alternative use as soon as possible. If he has any particular case that he would like to bring to our attention I should be grateful if he would write to us, and we shall certainly look into it.

Mr. O'Neill: Was not a reason for selling the Royal Ordnance factories the surplus capacity, with the obvious follow-on that the land would become available for sale because the company would not require it? Did the MOD valuers and surveyors at any time take into account not only alternative uses, but the ease with which outside planning permission for other activities could be obtained?

Is that not the reason why the property and land were sold at such a knock-down price and taxpayers were denied a sizeable income, which they could have had if a proper assessment had been made?

Mr. Sainsbury: In his last remark the hon. Gentleman seemed to be assuming that certain rumours in the press and speculative valuations that have originated in the City must necessarily be true. He may like to take some independent advice on that. I assure him that the chartered surveyors came to the Department with a valuation of the land that was included in the sale of the company—the company was sold as a whole—which took into account the factors to which he referred. The report on one valuation stated:

> "The land is within the Metropolitan Green Belt and redevelopment would be resisted. Our valuation assumes primarily agricultural or recreational use but with hope value of obtaining limited industrial or warehouse consents over a period."

NATO Nuclear Planning Group

16. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement of the outcome of the Scheveningen meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation nuclear planning group.

Mr. Younger: At the nuclear planning group meeting on 27 and 28 October Ministers reaffirmed the essential contribution made by nuclear weapons to NATO's strategy of deterrence and underlined their determination to take those actions required to keep the Alliance's forces, nuclear and conventional, up to date where necessary. While no decisions were taken or required at the meeting, Ministers noted the progress being made and agreed to continue a step-by-step approach to the work in hand. A copy of the communiqué issued after the meeting, and agreed by all Ministers, has been placed in the Library of the House.

Ms. Ruddock: Is it true that at that meeting the Secretary of State helped to crush Belgium's protest that it was too soon to discuss deploying new nuclear weapons in western Europe? Through those actions, is he not ruling out any further disarmament agreement; such as the INF, that would be available from the Soviet Union and would remove another entire range of nuclear weapons from our continent?

Mr. Younger: There is no truth in what the hon. Lady has said. There was no need for me to alter any Belgian view, because the Belgian Minister made it perfectly clear that he did not disagree with the content of the report. It was merely a matter of the timing of when we should approve it.

As the hon. Lady probably knows, we have succeeded—against all the advice that she has given us over the years—in obtaining the INF treaty, and if we continue to ignore her advice I hope that we shall obtain many more such treaties.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty The Queen.

Mr. Winnick: Why is it that after almost every speech by the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Prime Minister telling us that the economy is in good shape we hear news such as that of the massive trade deficit and even higher interest rates that penalise industry and home buyers? Are we not paying the price for the substantial decline of manufacturing industry in recent years while every encouragement has been given to the spivs, the financiers and the speculators in the City?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman omits to say that we have higher incomes than ever before, that we have a higher national income than ever before and that we have higher expenditure on social services than ever before. The nation is doing well, as I am sure the House will demonstrate tonight by a massive majority behind the Chancellor.

Q2. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kirkhope: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the failure of the Belgian Government to extradite Patrick Ryan was utterly shameful? Does she further agree that the apparently deliberate lethargy of the Irish Government in response to our requests for his extradition casts grave doubts on their commitment to the fight against terrorism?

The Prime Minister: I can well understand my hon. Friend's sense of frustration. Our request for Mr. Ryan's extradition from Belgium was prepared with the active co-operation of the Belgian authorities to meet all the requirements of Belgian law. We are utterly dismayed by the Belgian Government's decision to refuse extradition.

As regards the Republic of Ireland, fresh warrants for Mr. Ryan's arrest were obtained and transmitted to Dublin straight away last Friday night, together with all the additional documentation required by the Irish Attorney-General. Despite this, no action was taken by the Irish Attorney-General to serve provisional warrants or to endorse the original warrants.

The failure to secure Ryan's arrest is a matter of very grave concern to the Government. It is no use Governments adopting great declarations and commitments about fighting terrorism if they then lack the resolve to put them into practice.

Mr. John D. Taylor: As the Government's policy appears to be to maintain stability of exchange rates between sterling and European currencies, why will the Government not join the European monetary system?

The Prime Minister: The main priority of the Government is to get downward pressure on inflation. One cannot have two principal priorities.

Mr. Mates: Further to what my right hon. Friend has said, will she please make the strongest representations today to the Irish Government about their abject surrender for short-term political gain when one of the most wanted terrorists has been let free? Does this not show that despite the fine words that the Irish Government speak about the Anglo-Irish Agreement and about co-operation, there are many who will still believe that the Irish Republic is a safe haven for some terrorists seeking to escape the consequences of their actions?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, the Irish Attorney-General's failure to secure Ryan's arrest is a matter of very grave concern to the Government. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that, although the Government of the Republic of Ireland make fine-sounding speeches and statements, they do not always seem to be backed up by the appropriate deeds.

Mr. Ashdown: While not wishing to subscribe to the overheated rhetoric that we have heard from Conservative Members—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. These interruptions take up time.

Mr. Ashdown: —may I ask whether the Prime Minister is aware that her concern over the handling of the Ryan affair is very widely shared by many hon. Members and by people in many parts of the country? Does she agree that this matter comes at a particularly disturbing time in view of the review of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which many in Britain who wish Ireland well want to see operating successfully?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that fighting terrorism requires combined action on the part of all Governments to try to bring those who are accused of grievous crimes before the proper courts for them to pronounce justice. I hope that we shall receive support for that from all parts of the House.

Sir Jim Spicer: Will my right hon. Friend give an undertaking that neither her Government nor any British Government will accept a ruling by any court anywhere that will hinder us in the fight against terrorism?

The Prime Minister: I think that my hon. Friend is indirectly referring to a judgment given by the European Court of Human Rights. I assume that from his question. The European Court of Human Rights accepted that the purpose of the arrests fell within the provisions of the European convention on human rights. That is an important and welcome decision. Where the court disagrees with the Government is over the length of time that a suspect may be held without being brought before a court. Obviously we shall consider the judgment carefully, and in doing so we shall consider the human rights of victims and potential victims of terrorism as well as the human rights of those suspected of terrorist involvement. We shall ensure that the police have the powers that they need to tackle terrorism vigorously.

Q3. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fields: Does the Prime Minister recall her effusive praise and that of her party for the hospital workers in the aftermath of the Brighton bombing? Midwives are now leaving the Health Service and nurses, sisters and auxiliaries are discontented with the review. She is allowing her jackbooted Secretary of State for Health to trample all over the nurses. Is it not obvious that the review is phoney and needs to be overhauled in the interests of the Health Service and those who are employed in it?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, nurses have had a 45 per cent. increase in salaries in real terms during the lifetime of this Government. The hon. Gentleman spoke about nurses being in dispute. The vast majority of nurses and midwives are working normally and are satisfied with the generous award that they have received. This is hardly surprising, because it gives them an increase averaging 17·9 per cent. at a cost to the taxpayer of almost an extra £1 billion. I am proud to be able to take the credit for that extra pay for nurses.

Bexley

Q4. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to make an official visit to Bexley.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Mr. Evennett: Naturally, my right hon. Friend's reply will disappoint her many supporters in the London borough of Bexley. However, will my right hon. Friend ignore the whingeing and whining from the Opposition Front-Bench speakers on economic policy, because they do not understand economics? Will she come down to Bexley to see the successful results of her economic policy in action? Is she aware that in the past year unemployment in Bexley has fallen by 25 per cent.?

The Prime Minister: I am glad to hear that the changes that the Conservative Government have brought about have given a considerable increase in prosperity to my hon. Friend's constituency—the more so because many years ago, in 1950 and 1951, I fought the constituency of Erith and Crayford, and it was nothing like as good then.

Q5. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Griffiths: Does the Prime Minister still think that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is "brilliant" on mortgage rates, interest rates and the record trade deficit, because nobody else does?

The Prime Minister: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. I think that Edinburgh is a flourishing city —more flourishing than it has been for years.

Q6. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Shersby: Is my right hon. Friend aware that her leadership in calling for a world summit on the climate in London next March will be welcomed by everyone who is interested in the need to protect the ozone layer? Will she express the thanks of the House to ICI for its investment of £30 million in two new chemical plants to produce ecologically safe substitutes for chlorofluorocarbons?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. We have called another conference for 7 March in London to take further the previous decision on chlorofluorocarbons because of the effect that they are having on depleting the ozone layer. At the moment, the production of these chemicals has been taken down to 50 per cent. of its previous level and we wish to take it down much further—until we have only 15 per cent.—and eventually to eliminate it. It is complicated because, as my hon. Friend said, we must have proper scientific substitutes for the work that those chemicals do. I gladly join him in congratulating ICI on the great initiative that it has undertaken to find those solvents.

Mr. Kinnock: What advice has the Prime Minister to give to first-time home buyers—to those outside London who this year have had to find an average £40 a month extra in mortgage repayments, to those inside London who have had to find an extra £70 a month for their mortgage repayments and to those who dread the mortgage rises yet to come? As someone who, like me, is in favour of home buying, what does she advise them to do?

The Prime Minister: I find it difficult to believe the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question. I wonder why he fought so much against the sale of council houses. No one wishes to put up mortgage repayments. I point out that, except for those who recently purchased houses, the asset value of people's houses has gone up enormously in the past two years.

Mr. Kinnock: Is it not obvious from that answer that the Prime Minister has only one thing to say to home buyers, "Tough luck, you are on your own"?

The Prime Minister: Nonsense. Home ownership has gone up enormously under this Government and will continue to go up. As I am sure the right hon. Gentleman must know, people who have bought their houses have seen the asset value of those houses increase colossally.

Mr. Key: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the first duty of any dean and chapter of a cathedral is the maintenance of Christian worship? Does she also agree, however, that, as so many of our cathedrals are in need of substantial renovation to their fabric, they should at least be accorded the status given to parish churches and be eligible for restoration grants from the taxpayer?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend is aware, the Government make a good deal of money—or perhaps a certain amount of money—available for the restoration of parish churches and all of it is taken up. As my hon. Friend is also aware, a number of cathedrals have had special appeals and have been very successful in raising the money. I think that they have been stronger because they have raised the money privately, than they would have been if they had just had a grant from Government bodies. I hope that they will continue, but we would not like the amount of money available to parish churches to be less because of the demand from cathedrals.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to refer to a serious matter that has been raised by a number of hon. Members today. I should have thought that you might ask for another point of view to be expressed, and I hope that the Prime Minister is listening.

Mr. Speaker: I am very sorry, but the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that it is not possible for the Chair to call everyone who wishes to catch my eye on a question. It is just not possible, and it would not be fair.

Mr. Hume: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you agree that the issue and the question are too important to be addressed in such a short period and that we should have a full statement on the matter?

Mr. Speaker: That is a different matter.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I raised with you the question of a meeting in this House to be held by a cult leader. I now have further information that I believe you should consider. A copy of a speech that the gentleman gave to his members has come into my possession, which states that, after his death, they should kill each other. Is it proper, and is there anything that you can do to stop such a meeting taking place?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter of order for me.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I wish to raise a point of order arising from Prime Minister's questions, Mr. Speaker. You may be aware that there was a report from the Press Association at lunch time that the Prime Minister would make a statement in the House on the Irish question. I accept that you have no responsibility for what appears in the media, but, following the comments of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), does it not go to show that it would be far better for the Prime Minister to make a statement on that important matter rather than arrange for a planted question?

Mr. Speaker: That is a totally different matter.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): In reply to defence question No. 11, the Minister outlined the assistance that was given from Belize to Jamaica. I believe that my question was in order when I asked whether the same assistance could be given to Nicaragua in view of the ecological disaster that came to light last weekend. May I ask that you read the record tomorrow and give a ruling on the matter because I think that my question was appropriate?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot give such a ruling. If hon. Members are sophisticated enough, it is not too difficult for them to get their questions in order. The hon. Lady started her question by talking about Nicaragua when she should have been talking about Jamaica.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to delay the pig sticking that we are about to enjoy, but, further to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), I should point out that she was getting round to that point. *[Interruption.]* That is exactly what happened. Unfortunately, you were denied hearing what she was saying because of all the yobs on the Government Benches and the noise that they were making.

Mr. Speaker: We have a very important debate today. If I had to listen to Members getting round to subjects, I would be here a very long time.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, which is consequential to the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) and the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume). I ask you to accept that you can make a ruling on the repeated practice of the Government to use Question Time as a means of airing subjects that should be introduced in the form of statements. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to treat the matter seriously, to consider it overnight and to give a ruling tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: The House knows that I am not responsible for deciding whether statements should be made. Further, when an hon. Member asks a question, I cannot tell what the answer is likely to be. All that I am concerned about is whether the exchange is in order. I heard nothing today that was out of order.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): With due deference, Mr. Speaker, may I ask you when we have ever had to subject ourselves to a test to determine whether we are sophisticated enough to ask relevant questions? My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) asked whether it was important to help a certain country following a hurricane. Why should not such help apply to another country in the same area? When Nicaragua was mentioned, Conservative Members shouted so loudly that even you could not hear the point, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I did hear it. I think that we should get on. I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) to the fact that the main question was directed to the hurricane that hit Jamaica.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SIXTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [22 November]

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Sir Giles Shaw.]*

Question again proposed.

The Economy

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. I have selected also, for Division only, the amendment in the name of the leader of the Social and Liberal Democrats.

Given the pressure to speak in today's debate, I intend to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock. I express the hope that those who speak before that time do not speak for much longer than 10 minutes. Those who exceed that time will prevent their colleagues from participating in the debate.

3.37 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I beg to move, at the end of the Question, to add:

"But noting the economic mismanagement which has brought the worst trade deficit in British history and the highest interest rates of any major industrial country, humbly regret the way in which current policies have pushed up mortgage rates and other prices and charges and have damaged home buyers, low income families, and industry striving to improve competitiveness; further regret the proposals in the Gracious Speech for the privatisation of electricity and water which will put up prices, and are deeply concerned by the absence of any strategy for correcting the mistakes of the last Budget and improving long-term investment for building durable economic strength."

When the Chancellor of the Exchequer presented his Autumn Statement at the beginning of the month, he told us that the balance of payments deficit for the 12 months of 1988 would be £13 billion. Last Friday he had to report that for the first 10 months of the year the deficit was more than £12 billion, the worst trade deficit in British history. The right hon. Gentleman told us also at the beginning of the month that inflation would rise to 6·25 per cent. by the end of the year. By 18 November the rate had already surpassed that figure and was 6·4 per cent., the highest inflation rate in Europe with the exception of Greece. He expressed the hope at the beginning of the month that interest rates would stay at 12 per cent. Last Friday, they went to 13 per cent., making them without exception the highest rates in Europe. Interest rates in Britain are now 2·5 per cent. higher than those in America, 5 per cent. higher than those in France, 7 per cent. higher than those in West Germany and 8·5 per cent. higher than those in Japan. According to the CBI, these interest rate rises damage the international competitiveness of our industry.

At the CBI conference a few days ago, Mr. Norman Riccard of C. & J. Clarke accused the Chancellor of the Exchequer of gambling with the economy. Mr. David Pennock of Astell Scientific accused him of killing the goose that lays the golden egg. Mr. Terence Lilley complained that the dice are too heavily loaded against British industry. Yet another delegate accused the right hon. Gentleman of strangling the economy.

All that happened before Friday's interest rate rise from 12 per cent. to 13 per cent. It is hardly surprising that, with industrial and borrowing costs up by £1,300 million since June, the CBI should report pessimism among exporters and should predict that investment, high this year, will nearly halve next year and fall to only 1·5 per cent. in the year after that.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer should know all about that. After all, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said that high interest rates were not only

"the last thing that industry wants,"

they were also

"damaging to economic activity in general and the financial position of companies in particular."

Those comments were made by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury in 1980. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury in 1980 is the Chancellor of the Exchequer before us today.

This Chancellor and the Government told us in the previous Gracious Speech that they would pursue policies "designed further to reduce inflation".—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1987; Vol. 118, c. 39.]

The policies designed to reduce inflation further have raised inflation from 4·1 per cent. then to more than 6 per cent. now. With inflation blipping at 5 per cent., then 5·5 per cent., then 5·9 per cent. and now 6·4 per cent., and with it due to blip, temporarily of course, again with the rail fare rises in January, oil and food price rises in February, prescription rises in March, rates, rents, water and poll tax rises in April, and with gas and Telecom bills still to come, that is so substantial and sustained a blip that 1989 will be the fourth year in succession when inflation is above the European average. We hear that from the Chancellor——

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the inconsistency of complaining about rising inflation and complaining about increased interest rates designed to bring down that inflation rate?

Mr. Brown: The first effect of rising interest rates has been to push up mortgage rates. That has fed through into the real living costs of people up and down the country.

We hear all this about inflation from the Chancellor who promised us in 1984—repeated in 1987—that he was the Chancellor with the objective of zero inflation.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): May I remind the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) of what happened in the House on 25 October, which was the last occasion when the hon. Gentleman opened a major debate for the Labour party. On that occasion he blundered so badly in his speech that after he sat down he had to go upstairs to pressurise the Official Reporters to amend *Hansard* so that it included words that he had not uttered in the Chamber. All the hon. Member has shown is that —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that that is true.

Mr. Yeo: Will the hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Brown *rose*——

Mr. Yeo *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) has finished his intervention.

Mr. Yeo: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, which affects every hon. Member. If hon. Members cannot attend debates, they rely on the *Official Report* to inform them. On 25 October the *Official Report* contained words purported to have been used by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East which were not used by him. That fiddling of the record took place at the specific request of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know about this. I have looked into the matter and I have had a definite assurance from the Editor of *Hansard* that no such changes were made by the hon. Member.

Mr. Yeo: Mr. Speaker, I refer you to column 494 of the *Official Report* for 27 October 1988 when you confirmed that the record had in fact been changed and you apologised. The assurance that I now seek fom the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. What the hon. Gentleman has said is quite correct. I did say that, but I subsequently looked into the matter and I had an assurance from the Editor of *Hansard* that no alteration was made at the specific request of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). It was a mistake in the *Hansard* reporting.

Mr. Yeo: The alteration was certainly not made at the request of a Conservative Member. On referring to the tapes, we found that they recorded something different. The assurance that I seek for the protection of hon. Members who are not present here today is that no Opposition Member will seek to falsify the official record of today's debate.

Mr. Speaker: What the hon. Gentleman is alleging is incorrect. The mistake was not the mistake of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that we should dispose of this matter.

Mr. Dobson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), no doubt completing the task given to him by the Tory Whip, clearly said that my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) sought to falsify the account. That allegation should be withdrawn, and if he will not withdraw it, he should be withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: In view of what I have said, and the assurance that I have had from the Editor of *Hansard*, will the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) withdraw the allegation that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) asked for the record to be changed?

Mr. Yeo: I entirely stand by what I said, Mr. Speaker. The record of the tapes for that day shows that different words from those that appeared in *Hansard* were used by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East.

Mr. Speaker: I am not concerned with that. What I said was that I looked into the matter at the time and I have an assurance from the Editor of *Hansard* that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did not ask for the alteration to be made. All I am asking of the hon. Member for Suffolk, South is, as a matter of honour, to withdraw his allegation against the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Yeo: I gladly withdraw it, Mr. Speaker, if we have an assurance that no—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—Opposition Member will seek to tamper with today's record. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. No qualification please. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw the allegation absolutely.

Mr. Yeo: I withdraw the specific allegation that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East falsified the record.

Mr. Brown: I, too, have a letter from the Editor of *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, apologising for the mistake that he made. *[Interruption.]* Since Conservative Members persist in demanding to know what the letter says, it says:

> "I understand that you may have been caused some embarrassment, for which I apologise. If the issue is raised, please feel entirely free to quote my assurance that the responsibility for this regrettable mishap is entirely mine."

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an important debate. There is great pressure to speak. The hon. Member for Suffolk, South has withdrawn what he said. We must get on with the debate.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a very important debate in which the House and the country have a great interest. There is no point in raising further points of order with me about it. It has been dealt with by me and by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East.

Mr. Brown: The House wants to challenge the Government's case on interest rates, inflation and the balance of payments deficit, and deplores the stunts of Conservative Members.

Our case against the Chancellor——

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have had read to the House a letter from the Editor of *Hansard* in which, by his own admission, he has confirmed that the record was not an accurate account of what took place on that day. Obviously we want to get on with the debate today but I wonder whether I can call upon you, Mr. Speaker, to discuss the matter again with the Editor of *Hansard* so that the House may know the difference between the BBC tapes and what was reported to hon. Members in writing.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is only wasting time. Issues of this type bring no credit upon the House. A letter from the Editor of *Hansard* has already been read to the House. The official record is *Hansard*, not the tapes.

Mr. Brown: Our case against the Chancellor is not only the clear damage that he has been doing to British industry by high interest rates; it is not only that the expectations he has raised with tax cuts in the spring he has betrayed with price and mortgage rises in the autumn; it is not only that the British people are now paying many times over for his mistakes—as consumers with price rises, as home owners, as families suffering from the freeze on child benefit and as citizens with deteriorating public services. Our case against the Chancellor is that he should have known all along that to engineer a short-term consumer boom that was not underpinned by the strength of long-term, prior and adequate investment was bound to be unsustainable and bound to end in high trade deficits, high interest rates and higher inflation, with other economies, not ours, benefiting from the increased demand in Britain.

Conservative Back Benchers ask the Chancellor whether there will be a hard or soft landing. They should be asking him why there should have to be a landing at all. Higher interest rates, higher inflation and higher deficits are not the result of international events beyond his control. He cannot blame OPEC, oil sheikhs, American Presidents or the lack of international co-operation. The higher interest rates, higher inflation and higher deficits are the direct result of mistakes made in the Treasury—mistakes for which the Chancellor has not yet had to pay but for which millions of British people are already paying dearly. When people ask nowadays what is to be done by the Government, they no longer ask which policies of the Chancellor will succeed but who will succeed the Chancellor.

What is the Prime Minister's policy in all this? What is her attitude to higher interest rates, higher inflation and the state of the pound? Her policy is to bring Professor Sir Alan Walters back to Britain. It is not surprising that Professor Walters has said that he will be taking an increasing role in the British economy. Those are his words. The increasing role he will enjoy at No. 10 will mean a decreasing role for the Chancellor at No. 11. It can hardly have escaped the Chancellor's attention that, although in the past the Prime Minister has applauded the Chancellor as wonderful, brilliant and marvellous, when she went to America and gave half a dozen major interviews, including questions on the state of the economy, she did not think it important to mention the Chancellor's brilliance or even his existence.

> "There is obviously quite a difference in emphasis."

So said Professor Walters, describing the disagreements between the Chancellor and the Prime Minister. He added:

> "Timing is, of course, another aspect of the difference."

The difference in emphasis between Professor Walters and the Chancellor is such that the Chancellor believed that close links with the deutschmark were right for Britain. Professor Walters said that that was nonsense, then said that it was "misguided" and then that it had "tragic" consequences. The Prime Minister, it appears, agrees with Professor Walters. The Chancellor thought that reducing interest rates in January was a good idea. Professor Walters and then the Prime Minister thought it was a mistake for which, as Professor Walters said, "We have to atone." Now the Chancellor has been forced to agree with Professor Walters.

The Chancellor thought that a high pound was damaging for British industry, the Prime Minister said that that was mistaken and now the Chancellor has had to agree with Professor Walters as the pound rises. Professor Walters has left us in no doubt of what he thinks are the Chancellor's prospects. He said:

> "People are saying he has been there too long."

We know the people in Britain to whom Sir Alan talks. He said:

> "It may well be that the Chancellor is thinking of moving on."

The Chancellor may already be regretting his remarks during happier times a few years ago at a Conservative party conference, when he said that the good thing about staying at No. 11 Downing street was that there was

> "no trouble with the neighbours."

Any trouble will not last long, not because relations between the neighbours at No. 10 and No. 11 are always amicable, but because at the will of the Prime Minister they are always terminable. As the Chancellor will find to his cost, the Prime Minister is the one neighbour in Britain with the power of eviction.

This is the Chancellor who, earlier this year, declared the economic problem to be solved; the Chancellor who, even a few days ago during an interview with Sir Robin Day—of which the tape, fortunately, still survives—said that the British economy, under his leadership, had been transformed, that economic performance was the best in our lifetimes and that an economic miracle had been achieved.

How does the Chancellor explain that economic miracle to the family on the average wage with the standard mortgage—and there are thousands like them—who received tax cuts worth £12 in March, who are already being hit with an increase in mortgage repayments of £30 a month and who are now being told that that sacrifice is not enough and that they face additional rises of almost £10 a month? The total increase in repayments this year might add up to £40 a month, yet the Chancellor tells us that his interest rate rises have yet to bite.

What does the Chancellor say about the economic miracle to the first-time buyer, with £50 a month more in mortgage repayments on average, on top of all the other rises, and set against an average of only £7 a month in tax cuts? They will soon face rises in charges for electricity, water, rates, the telephone and gas—and all that from a Chancellor who tells us in the Gracious Speech——

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: The Chancellor——

Mr. Tebbit *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is not giving way.

Mr. Tebbit *rose*——

Mr. Brown: The second battalions have come to assist.

The Chancellor told us in the Gracious Speech that he would bear down on prices. How will he bear down on electricity prices, water prices, rates and the poll tax?

A few days ago the Chancellor spoke about the necessity to educate his Back Benchers. It is not the Chancellor who needs to educate his Back Benchers about the realities of life; it is his Back Benchers who now need to educate the Chancellor about the living costs that people are facing, even as mortgages rise.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: All we have from the Chancellor is the astonishing effrontery——

Mr. Onslow *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman can see that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is not giving way.

Mr. Brown: All we have from the Chancellor is a call for self-discipline——

Mr. Onslow *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East giving way?

Mr. Brown: No.

Mr. Onslow *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East.

Mr. Brown: All we have from the Chancellor is a call for self-discipline from home owners and for wage restraint from earners. Is it not remarkable that the party that accepts no responsibility for the financial mismanagement that brought these mortgage rises was the very party which said in its 1979 manifesto—when mortgages were lower than they are now:

"Mortgage rates have risen steeply because of the Government's financial mismanagement."

Why will the Government not now accept responsibility for the financial mismanagement for which they criticised the Labour Government?

Does the Prime Minister recall her promise of a fixed-rate mortgage of 9·5 per cent.? Does she recall that that promise has been fulfilled in only two months out of the 114 months that she has held office? Does the Prime Minister recall telling us that, under the Tory manifesto policies that she supported in 1974, the great advantage of the mortgage proposals was that

"at last the young couple can really budget for the future knowing how much they have to spend"?

Will the Prime Minister now tell that young couple how they will budget for the future when they have had to spend 30 per cent. of their income during the first half of the year on their mortgages and will now have to spend more than 40 per cent. of their income as a result of the mistake?

We know that an engineer on an average wage and with a standard mortgage is facing a fall in living standards of about £1 a week, a teacher of about £4 a week and a shop assistant of about £5 a week. A nurse with a standard mortgage—even after her regrading—will be £1 a week worse off. Those are the economic consequences for the vast majority. That is not the whole story. The many who have gained least are suffering most; but the few who have gained most are gaining even more.

Does the Chancellor agree that, because of his top rate tax cuts and then of his interest rate rises—when the standards of living for shop assistants, teachers, nurses and engineers have started to fall—the standard of living for those lucky enough to be in the top 1 per cent. and have unearned income—the very rich—is rising from anything between 15 and 50 per cent. a year?

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I can think of no comparable situation this century when the gains to a few have been so great at the expense of the burdens to be placed on the shoulders of the vast majority.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: Yet the one thing that this Government should do is the one thing that they will always refuse to do. The one possible solution that would help to restore the balance in the economy, that would restore the balance between the regions and the south-east—and that would shift resources from top rate tax cuts to investment—is the one measure that the Government will not even contemplate, the withdrawal of top rate tax cuts. When the political imperatives of appeasing the Chancellor's own tiny interest group clash with the economic requirements of the nation, his own small interest group will come first every time. This is the Chancellor who is prepared to make the home owner pay with higher mortgages, prepared to make the commuter pay with deteriorating rail networks, prepared to make the consumer pay with higher prices, especially for public utilities, prepared to make the pensioner pay with lower housing benefits, prepared to make whole communities pay with the poll tax and deteriorating public services, and prepared to make students pay with new loans for their studies, but who is not prepared to make the top rate taxpayer pay his fair share. The Chancellor is prepared to use every fiscal device to maintain and discharge the historic mission of the Conservative party to the very rich.

Our case against the Chancellor is that he is the first Chancellor in history to have the unique opportunities offered by North sea oil, yet under his and his predecessor's leadership a consumer boom has been engineered in which investment has been insufficient to ensure that we have the productive capacity to meet demand. During this year, while consumption is growing as fast as it is among many of our neighbours, our industrial production even now is growing half as fast as that of Japan and the result is that imports are growing fastest of all.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: There has been £120 billion from the North sea and £70 billion from North sea tax revenues. Those are resources that no Government have ever had or will ever have again for investment in the future. The real economic miracle is that, with the once-and-for-all investment opportunities that the Chancellor had, he has managed to bring us back to stop-go policies even before the oil has run out. Never before in our history have we imported so much and the balance of trade deficit been so great.

The Chancellor told us last week that the real reason for high growth this year is that investment has been rising so fast. However, the real issue is not the rate of investment in 1988, during and at the end of a boom, but the low rate of investment between 1979 and 1988. Is it not the case that not only has investment in industry as a whole already started to tail off, not only that it has been growing slower than in many of our competitor countries, such as Japan, even from a lower base—if we were investing the same share of our national income this year as other countries, such as France, we would have been investing several billion pounds more—but that the real achievement of the

Chancellor for 1988 is that from investing as small a share of our national income in ourselves as Belgium, we are now investing only as big a share as Greece?

I shall tell the Chancellor why the consumer boom that he has engineered cannot be sustained. It is not because our growth rate is too high, but because the capacity of our economy is too low. The capacity of our economy is too low, because our long-term commitment to investment has been too little. Investment in this country should have been made from 1979 onwards—before the consumer boom and not at the end and after it. Even with all the figures for investment that the Chancellor will quote this afternoon, Britain is still investing less of its national income in itself in the oil rich 1980s than it ever did in the 1960s and 1970s. Even if the Chancellor had invested as big a share of our national income as France, we would have today invested £4,000 more for training and research for each worker. If we had invested as much as Germany, it would be £6,000 more per worker. If we had invested as much as Italy, it would be £7,000 more per worker. If we had invested as much as Japan, it would be £20,000 more per worker. It is that investment gap——

Mr. Dickens: So what?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman says, "So what?". I shall tell the hon. Gentleman so what. So what are the skill shortages that arise from the failure to invest in education? So what is the failure to invest in research and innovation that has put us behind in high-technology industry? So what is the failure to invest in the regions that has caused us the problems that we face today?

Mr. David Shaw (Dover) *rose*——

Mr. William Cash (Stafford) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I can have only one hon. Member on his feet at a time. The hon. Gentleman is not giving way.

Mr. Brown: The tragedy is that, even when the Government must admit that the private sector is not doing a proper job in research and innovation and in science and technology, even when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry must concede that the private sector spending on research and development is a smaller proportion of our national income than is the case in other countries and is growing more slowly, and even when it is recognised elsewhere that the market will not do the job itself and public investment, co-ordination and involvement is necessary, this Government are so wedded to free market dogma that they will not bridge the science gap by investing to prepare properly for our future. *[Interruption.]*

Sir Peter Horden (Horsham) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I shall tell Conservative Members about the lack of investment in skills. Why is it that two thirds of firms in the south-east say that they are facing skills shortages? Why is it that 27 per cent. of firms even in the north-east are saying the same? Why is it that skill shortages are so bad that to build the Channel tunnel we have had to recruit engineers from Egypt and Hong Kong? Why is it that the skill shortage and the lack of training is so bad that British firms are considering sending apprentices to Germany for proper training? Most of all, why is it that the director general of the Training Agency, Mr. Roger Dawe, an official of this Government, only a few days ago said at a conference organised by the Institute of Personnel Management, and in advance of the training White Paper:

> "At every level we are towards the bottom of the training league table, whether in education, youth training, higher levels of skill training or management training"?

Does it make the Chancellor proud that we end the 1980s with a training and skills position that is well below our competitors, even after North sea oil?

Mr. Ian Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I repeat that this debate is of great interest not only to the House, but to the country. I ask hon. Members to give the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East a fair hearing.

Mr. Hind *rose*——

Mr. Brown: What is most worrying——

Mr. Onslow: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that you did not intend to suggest that we do not wish to give the hon. Gentleman a fair hearing. What we want is for him to show that this is a debate and to give way so that we may question him.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is aware that, if an hon. Member does not give way, the hon. Member who rises in his place should not persist.

Mr. Brown: What is most worrying as a result of the investment gap of more than nine years, as a result of the waste of North sea oil revenues, as a result of the privatisation proceeds that the Government have enjoyed —proceeds not only derived from industry sales, but the £2[illegible] billion they have had from the sale of land and assets —is that the gap in our science provision, in our research and education provision and in our education and skills provision is now such that that is the main reason why imports are growing so much and why we cannot compete properly in our balance of payments. What is most worrying is that that gap in our balance of payments is growing most not in the traditional industries that might be expected to be falling away, but in the new, high-technology industries, such as computers, electronics, data processing and information technology.

As we face 1992 and Europe, our trade gap with our EEC competitors has gone from a surplus to a deficit of £13 billion, rising perhaps to £15 billion—that has happened in eight years. That deficit is now becoming pronounced in chemicals, metal goods, textiles and engineering. How can we possibly compete with the high wage, high employment, high investment, high-technology economies of Europe if we do not prepare properly for the future?

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Brown: The country wants to hear the debate about what is happening to families up and down the country, and what is happening to industry. This afternoon we have had a deliberate attempt to stop that debate from taking place.

There are a number of questions that the Chancellor should answer this afternoon, questions about matters

[Mr. Brown]

that command a growing consensus within the country and even within parts of the Conservative party. First, does he agree that he cannot repeat the error of last year's Budget and that he must signal now, when it would have the maximum beneficial effect on interest rates, that the underlying problems of the economy that he has created cannot sustain a tax-cutting Budget in the spring? Secondly, does he agree that, in the policies that are needed to achieve a balanced economic development in this country, the burden should fall not on low or middle-income Britain, which is already paying a high price for the Chancellor's policies, but on those top-rate taxpayers who never needed the tax cuts in the first place?

Thirdly, will the Chancellor act directly on the inflation that he has created by abandoning his further plans in the Autumn Statement for large price rises in the water and electricity industries and in other public services for which he has a direct responsibility?

Fourthly, does the Chancellor agree that his next Budget should, above all, be a Budget for long-term investment and not one for short-term consumption? It should be a Budget for investment with policies to enhance savings and to ease credit. It should be a Budget to target investment, which is now likely to halve next year and then probably, as a result of the Chancellor's policies, to come to a stop. It should be a Budget to address the real capacity constraints in the economy, especially the skill shortages that the Government's mistakes have created. It should be a Budget to address the regional imbalances which distort our country.

Does the Chancellor agree that only with a Budget for investment will he be able to secure long-term, sustainable growth and balanced economic development without running into the very problems of over-heating and inflationary pressures that his policies have now created?

The Chancellor knows about stop-go policies. He made a reasonable living in the 1960s and 1970s castigating its ex-practitioners. He knows about boom and bust. He knows about spending sprees and about inflationary hangovers. He knows all about the cycle of over-indulgence and about having to pay the bills later. Yet this Chancellor has become no less a stop-go Chancellor than Selwyn Lloyd, whom he much criticised. He has become no less a boom and bust Chancellor than Lord Barber, whom he and his friends castigated. The most serious charge of all is that he is the only stop-go Chancellor in history who has had the full investment opportunities of North sea oil, opportunities for a real supply side miracle which have been dissipated and squandered. No Chancellor has had better luck and worse judgment.

The Chancellor has claimed only one stated objective and he has chosen to use only one instrument of policy. He has had five years in which to pursue his single goal using his single instrument of policy. Even with the unique advantages available to him, he has failed. All he has done is to create tax opportunities, tailor-made for people with vast fortunes in the City. To the City, sooner or later, the Chancellor will doubtless go. He has failed the country.

4.17 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): We have just heard perhaps the most trivial opening speech—*[Interruption.]*—in any economic debate on the Queen's Speech that I have ever heard during all my time in the House.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), towards the end, asked me four questions. I can answer his four questions with a single answer—there will be no change of policy. *[Interruption.]* All we had——

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough) *rose*——

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did not give way once during his speech so I will not give way.

We had a speech—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Opposition were previously complaining about the noise from the Government Benches. They must give the Chancellor the same hearing that they expected for the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

Mr. Lawson: We had a speech composed of tittle-tattle and economic illiteracy in equal parts. There was not a hint of any positive policy proposal from the other side, not one —not even after their recent deliberations in a SOGAT convalescent home in Rottingdean. Is the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East not aware that living standards in this country are higher than they have ever been before? Is he not aware of that?

As for investment—the hon. Gentleman took a lot of time over investment, so perhaps he and hon. Members opposite will listen to this. I know that they do not like hearing the truth and I know that it is very painful for them, but I hope that they will listen to this. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Onslow: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am listening to a point of order.

Mr. Onslow: I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, can persuade Opposition Members on the Back Benches, as well as those on the Front Bench, to give my right hon. Friend the Chancellor a fair hearing.

Mr. Speaker: The Opposition expected a fair hearing, so they must give the same fair hearing to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East went on at some length about investment. Is he not aware that while Labour were in government public sector investment—to which they attach particular importance —was slashed by 12 per cent. in real terms and total investment, during the whole of their period of office, rose by a princely 1·4 per cent.? That was their record. He asked me about our record during the whole of the period since 1979, so I shall give him that. During the whole of that period since 1979, total investment in this country has risen by 36 per cent. in real terms. That is the truth of the matter and indeed——

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lawson: Under Labour, it was only in one of their six years that investment was higher than consumption and that was only because consumption did not rise at all.

The most revealing aspect of the long-winded Opposition amendment, against which we shall be voting tonight, is that nowhere does it once mention inflation —not once. And this despite the fact that the risk of a resurgence of inflation is the only real problem facing the British economy today, a risk far greater than any threat arising from the deficit on the current account of the balance of payments. And despite the fact too that it is precisely to avert this inflationary risk and to ensure that, within a matter of months, inflation resumes its downward path that I have sharply tightened monetary policy, culminating in the increase in base rates to 13 per cent. last Friday.

This telling omission from the Opposition amendment reveals once again one of the major differences between the two sides of this House, because the Labour party is at best indifferent to inflation and in practice, as we saw when it was last in office, it is the party of inflation—that is the truth—whereas for us on this side of the House the control of inflation lies at the very heart of our economic policy. So that, Mr. Speaker, is what I turn to first, because that is what the House wants to hear about most.

Over the past five years or so that I have been Chancellor, during a period of almost unparalleled growth in prosperity, recorded inflation has averaged 4¾ per cent. a year. That is a massive improvement over the average inflation rate of 15½ per cent. a year under Labour, a period of equivalent length. But what clearly gives cause for concern is that inflation should now be rising, however gradually, rather than falling.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): There is no excuse for that.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lawson: The key to economic success is confidence. For some years now, confidence in the British economy, among business men and consumers alike, has been rising. But it was not until our third general election victory, in June of last year, that—not surprisingly—confidence moved into overdrive, so much so that there was a real danger that spending would rise too fast, generating inflationary pressures. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lawson: I know that the Opposition do not like the truth, but they are going to get it and I am going to go on.

And so it was for this reason that in August of last year I decided to tighten monetary policy by raising interest rates by a full point—a move which caused no little controversy at the time.

Then came the stock market crash of 19 October, black Monday, and for the first and only time as Chancellor I then judged the risks of recession to be greater than the risks of inflation, and loosened monetary policy in concert with the other major nations.

Today, with the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to say that the stock market crash was merely a financial market phenomenon of no relevance to the real economy. But those who are honest with themselves, and think back to that fragile and difficult time, just over a year ago, will acknowledge that that was not how it looked and felt then. Indeed, I vividly recall that the Opposition were calling on me to do far more than I did in order to avert what they saw as the coming slump.

If I may quote from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) at the time, he said:

"Following the crash in the financial markets, and with the threat of an economic crisis looming, the House should concentrate its mind on the lessons to be learnt from the turbulent events of recent weeks with one overriding objective —the urgent steps that need to be taken to ward off the threat of economic downturn, with the painful consequences for jobs, the standard of living and the national economic strength that would come in train of that."—[*Official Report,* 5 November 1987; Vol. 121, c. 1084.]

That is what the Opposition were urging at the time.

Given the balance of risks at the time, I believe I was fully justified in doing what I did.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): What about next time?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lawson: But the outcome, as we now know, was a period of inadequate monetary rigour, and as the economy sailed through the crash with confidence unimpaired, it was that that enabled inflation to edge up again in 1988.

But it is important to see the scale of the new inflationary danger in perspective. Unlike almost all other major countries, we include mortgage interest payments in our retail price index, a perverse anomaly which seriously obscures the underlying trend. Excluding mortgage interest payments, we see that inflation rose steadily during the first half of this year to reach 5 per cent. by July.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lawson: On the same basis, it has barely changed since, with the latest recorded figure, for October, standing at 5·1 per cent. Some time during the first half of next year, I would expect the RPI, excluding mortgage interest payments, to peak at around 5½ per cent. before inflation resumes its downward trend.

To be fair, I shall compare that with the lowest underlying inflation figure—that is to say, excluding mortgage interest payments—which the last Labour Government ever secured; and the lowest figure they ever secured in a single month—excluding mortgage interest payments—was 7·7 per cent.

We have, of course, been through this before.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lawson: No, I shall not.

There was an inflation blip in 1985. Then, too, the underlying rate peaked at 5½ per cent. before coming down again, and then, too, it was a sharp rise in interest rates which did the trick. For let there be no mistake about it: inflation is a monetary phenomenon. It has to be cured by monetary policy, and that means the vigorous use of interest rates—and interest rates work. They worked in 1985.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lawson: They provided the economic success we have subsequently enjoyed, and they will work, if anything, even more effectively today, and provide the basis for our continued economic success.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Chancellor give way on that point?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lawson: Higher interest rates have already had a marked effect on the housing market, which is overwhelmingly the principal engine of consumer credit in this country. And the effect will intensify in the new year, as building societies introduce the higher rates for existing borrowers who have hitherto largely been shielded from the rates that new borrowers are already paying.

I have to warn my right hon. and hon. Friends that this will not make us popular. But, as a Government, we have never shirked taking unpopular measures when these are needed. And this is needed now, to defeat the scourge of inflation, which is precisely what it will do.

Nor, incidentally, are credit controls any alternative. Having created the most dynamic economy this country has known by our progressive abandonment of Socialist controls, the last thing we want to do is to go back to that dead end. But even if it were thought desirable, it would not work.

Nowadays, 80 per cent. of all household borrowing is on mortgages. So nothing could be effective that did not cover mortgage lending, too. And to be really effective, as well as equitable, contrary to the bizarre scheme dreamed up the other day by the Leader of the Opposition, it would have to cover existing borrowers as well as new borrowers.

Moreover, all the well advised would readily be able to avoid United Kingdom controls, for example by borrowing offshore—unless, of course, it is suggested that exchange controls should be reimposed at the same time.

The truth of the matter is that interest rates are a singularly well-directed instrument of policy. What the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East totally failed to realise in his earlier remarks is that unlike in 1980, when the company sector was in poor shape and the household sector was a net saver rather than a net borrower, today the company sector's finances are unprecedentedly strong, while the household sector has become, for the first time ever, a substantial net borrower. So it is on consumer spending, and not corporate spending, that higher interest rates will have their principal effect.

Mr. Stuart Holland (Vauxhall): What about small firms?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East seemed concerned about the regional balance so I trust that he will listen to this. Even the regional impact of higher interest rates is well directed. For it is in the south of England that borrowing has risen most, and it is also in the south of England where mortgages in excess of £30,000, the limit of tax relief, are most prevalent. So it is in the south that higher interest rates will have their greatest impact.

The plain fact is that there is no alternative to the use of interest rates to keep the economy on course; and it works, which, of course, is why all other well-conducted economies rely on it—most recently the United States, which only yesterday, like us, raised its interest rates to their highest levels since 1985.

And what of the current account of the balance of payments? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lawson: It is important to recognise, first, that a current account deficit is not like a company running at a loss. It is more like a company that, though profitable, cannot finance its investment programme entirely from its own resources, and has to raise funds from the market to fill the gap. A country in a similar position will draw on the savings of the world, which has been greatly facilitated by today's global markets.

Unlike the United States today, however, or the United Kingdom in the 1960s and the 1970s, the present current account deficit is not the counterpart of a capital inflow to finance a budget deficit. On the contrary, we have a substantial budget surplus, which I—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey) *rose*——

Mr. Lawson: No. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Chancellor.

Mr. Lawson: No, I am sorry. I have not given way to Opposition Members. Therefore, it is only fair that I should not give way to those on this side.

Our present current account deficit is the counterpart of a capital inflow which is financing a purely private sector deficit: the gap between private sector savings and private sector investment. And this gap in turn has arisen, not so much because private sector savings have fallen, but because private sector investment has risen to some 16 per cent. of GDP, the highest figure ever.

Sir Peter Tapsell *rose*——

Mr. Faulds: The hon. Member knows more about this than the Chancellor. The right hon. Gentleman should give way.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lawson: For while personal savings have fallen, as personal borrowing has risen, corporate savings have risen by a roughly equivalent amount.

This does not mean, of course, that the current account deficit is sustainable indefinitely. But what it does mean is that it will in due course correct itself, as personal savings rise again, not least in response to the higher level of interest rates and the end of the great housing bubble. And meanwhile, it is readily financeable.

Our reserves stand at record levels. Our net overseas assets are second only to those of Japan. The world has confidence in us. And sterling is strong—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that private conversations will not go on during this speech. I call Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Lawson: As I was saying, our reserves stand at record levels. Our net overseas assets are second only to those of Japan. The world has confidence in us. And sterling is strong. Moreover, I am determined that it shall stay strong for the indefinite future—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that Opposition Front Bench Members will give a lead to those behind them.

Mr. Lawson: The Front Bench opposite is not the slightest bit interested in a serious debate on the economy. That is absolutely clear.

Those with long memories will know that there is no such thing as a balance of payments crisis; there is only a sterling crisis. And that there is not—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I appeal to the House to listen to the right hon. Gentleman? After all, he is not that sophisticated, is he?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that that barb was directed at me.

Mr. Lawson: I see you have a rival Mr. Speaker.

In short, as we win the battle against inflation, the balance of payments will take care of itself.

Finally, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East sought to make a great song and dance about the inaccuracy of Treasury forecasts. The Treasury forecasts in March, in particular, were indeed inaccurate, as, equally, were all the outside forecasts that were made at that time. But I think it is worth pausing a while to see what we got wrong in the forecast. Certainly we underestimated the growth of total consumption. We forecast that it would rise by 3½ per cent.: it now looks as if it will have risen by 1 per cent. more—4½ per cent.

But the big mistake was in our forecast of the growth of investment. We forecast that that would rise by 6½ per cent. In fact, it now looks as if it will have risen by at least 12 per cent., an error of at least 5½ per cent.

That is why overall spending in the economy has been so high, and why imports have risen so fast. Exports this year have been at all-time record levels, with the deficit entirely attributable to the sharp rise in imports.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker: would it really have been better if investment had risen by only 6½ per cent. in line with our forecast? Would that have been better?

Mr. Faulds: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order.

Mr. Faulds: It is extremely valid, Sir. As the only person who can benefit from this performance is the right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), can we take the rest as read and proceed to the debate?

Mr. Speaker: Plainly, that is not a point of order. I call Mr. Chancellor.

Mr. Lawson: Let me—although I know it is painful for the Opposition—take them back to the period of the last Labour Government. So far as I can recall, their forecasting record was consistently abysmal, but I have not looked it up recently, so let us suppose that in fact they had got all their forecasts exactly right, to the last decimal point. Let us just suppose that. Would that have made their lamentable economic performance one whit less bad, the explosion of inflation one jot less appalling, and the stagnation of living standards one iota less depressing? Of course not.

What matters is not economic forecasts, whose fallibility I have always been the first to proclaim, but economic performance. That is what matters. And the plain fact is that the performance of the British economy over the past five years has been outstanding.

During that time, economic growth has averaged 3½ per cent. a year, with inflation in low single figures—a combination we have not known for generations. As a result, there are today more people at work in this country than ever before in our history, and unemployment continues to fall, as it has done consistently, ever since the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East predicted, in his characteristically forthright and mistaken way:

> "The Government simply cannot reduce unemployment by present policies".

Since then it has fallen every single month. But you know, Mr. Speaker, it is a funny thing that time was when we heard about nothing but unemployment from the Opposition spokesman during an economic debate. That used to be the pattern. We have heard little about it today —nothing, as far as I can recall—and it is not mentioned once in the Official Opposition amendment. I wonder why. The plain fact is that we welcome the fall in unemployment, even if the party opposite does not.

And what about the nature of the growth we have been enjoying as a nation? I mentioned the rapid growth of investment this year—the biggest increase for at least 20 years. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East tried to pretend that this was some flash in the pan—that it had suddenly happened this year. That is totally untrue. It is part of a consistent pattern.

Over the past five years as a whole, investment in this country has grown very nearly twice as fast as consumption, which is a very sharp contrast with the performance of the last Labour Government, when consumption, admittedly, grew fairly slowly, but investment scarcely grew at all.

So much for the economically illiterate cry of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East that what we have is a short-lived consumer boom. That is what he said, and the whole House heard him. It is, in fact, the longest lived investment-led expansion the British economy has experienced for decades.

The only thing that is short is the period since hon. Members opposite first could bring themselves to recognise that the British economy was expanding at all. But then they are very slow. They have only now stumbled, I read, on the phrase "supply side Socialism", at a time when, for the first time ever, the supply side of the British economy has been transformed, with record productivity growth, record investment, sweeping tax reform, including the ending of penal rates on enterprise, a budget surplus with all the strength that brings, record profitability, and an economy freer of unnecessary restrictions and controls than at any time since the war. Not least by throwing out the Socialist impedimenta they now seemingly wish to bring back, we are well on the way to a supply-side miracle that has the admiration of the world. Compared with what we have achieved here over the past nine and a half years, and will continue to achieve, the slowing down of the growth of demand which is currently required is a simple and straightforward task.

As the Gracious Speech which we are debating today demonstrates, after more than nine years of office it is still this Government who are generating the new ideas and setting the national agenda. We can do so above all because we have the firm foundation of a strong economy and a sound economic policy, one which commands the

[Mr. Lawson]

confidence both of the British people and of the world. That is why we will be victorious not just in the House tonight but in the country in the years to come.

4.44 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): The Chancellor will be well aware that, from 1979, the Treasury received strong support from my party for the doctrine that an annual inflation rate of even 3 per cent. was unacceptable, simply because such a rate halves the value of money within rather less than 25 years. A former occupant of this Bench, Mr. Enoch Powell, was less than successful in preventing the Government from diluting another tenet of economic fact, that inflation is caused by Governments and not by trade unions, employers, bankers or business men.

Over the years, the real culprits have been Governments. In their earlier years, the Government appeared to understand that fact well. Only as a kind of afterthought did they depart from the true faith and begin to babble about wage increases and the like. Although it was always clear that the Chancellor was taking risks with inflation and that, in part—but only in part—his risks have created the present situation, in the end, the real offender will probably turn out to be an obsession with the exchange rate of sterling.

I have not been persuaded that any of the suggested remedies or alternatives to interest rates would succeed in halting and, eventually, reducing inflation. I do not deny that high interest rates can have a painful effect, but roaring inflation on the scale that was experienced in the 1970s would be infinitely more painful to a far wider range of people, including in particular the poorest in our society.

Whatever may be the remedial measures that he has chosen, the Chancellor and his right hon. Friend the First Lord of the Treasury will have my party's full support in resisting the seriously flawed advice of Lord Cockfield. Only a week ago, that outgoing Commissioner asked:

> "Why should trade and industry in Europe be denied the immense advantages of a single currency simply to preserve the sovereign national rights of finance Ministers to mismanage their affairs?"

My answer to his Lordship is that the sovereign national rights of Finance Ministers rank high on our list of priorities. I trust that other right hon. and hon. Members share my conviction.

We are not debating constitutional issues, but, for Treasury control, the threat is real enough. In the debate on the European Communities (Finance) Bill on 27 October 1988, the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) used a telling phrase. He said:

> "Powers that we think lie with Whitehall are moving."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1988; Vol. 1461, c. 521.]

To any Britisher, that is a chilling phrase.

Lord Cockfield's impatience demonstrates that he knows the truth of that phrase. His complaint is that the powers are not moving fast enough. His bribe to the Treasury is that, if sterling were linked to other European currencies, we would have assistance in forcing sterling down. The Cockfield outburst is of particular interest to the regions of the United Kingdom. If his intention is to deprive the Treasury of what he called sovereign national rights to raise revenue, it follows that the Treasury will have to surrender its right and, in the case of the regions, its duty to allocate moneys to benefit those parts of the nation that have suffered greatly through the encroachment of the European Commission into most aspects of decision-making in member states.

One of my reasons for opposing entry in 1972 was that membership would have the effect of tilting the map table of the United Kingdom towards the south-east, resulting in all the counters sliding towards that corner of England. That belief was not denied then and cannot be denied now that the prediction has been fulfilled. The Government are justified in compensating the regions of England and the other regions represented by the parties situated below the Gangway. I know that I shall be told that the EEC specialises in dispensing charity in the form of regional funds. It would be more accurate to say that, thanks to the determined efforts of the Prime Minister, the nation gets some of our own money back through various channels, schemes and devices.

Would any right hon. or hon. Member concede that the gentlemen in Brussels always know best? Can they really judge the needs of a given constituency better than the Member elected to represent that constituency in this House? I trust that whatever our disagreements in this debate we can at least firmly resolve to preserve the "sovereign national rights" of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his Treasury colleagues to act in the best interests of the United Kingdom, after taking into account the advice which has been tendered and no doubt will be tendered today.

I trust that the House will feel that I have made a reasonable case for sympathetic consideration to be accorded to the financial needs of the regions. As one would expect, the Gracious Speech avoids inter-party argument over what was called by a former Prime Minister, the "governance of the United Kingdom". But we do the United Kingdom no service if we ignore the political and constitutional considerations which have emerged since the dissolution of the last Parliament. The general election results do not endanger the integrity of the United Kingdom, but real danger could arise from a perception that those results are being ignored. Such a perception should be, and I hope will be, treated with great sensitivity because if it is not, real or imaginary grievances will build up to resentment over the remaining years of the present Parliament to such an extent that there will be a feeling that something has gone profoundly wrong with our common Britishness.

This is not the occasion to propose new structures, but perhaps a pointer may lie in the reference to Northern Ireland in the Gracious Speech which reads that the Government will continue

> "to give elected representatives greater involvement."

The Single European Act has curtailed that involvement and influence of Members of Parliament in this House, and in local government there has been an erosion of the involvement of elected representatives. As a first step we must halt the drift and then as parliamentarians, hopefully together, carefully consider how we can reinvolve elected representatives in structures that will be of a pattern common to the component parts of this United Kingdom.

4.54 pm

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I always follow closely what the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) says. He is labouring under one misapprehension in believing that we have no say in the regional grants which are made by the European Community. We have always been able to deal directly with them and they certainly affect Northern Ireland. I would have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would have been prepared to acknowledge the considerable help that Northern Ireland has received from these grants, which have particularly helped its development and its industries. He cannot have any grumble about the arrangements that exist and I do not see that he should regard this as a basic challenge to the sovereignty of the United Kingdom, let alone the position of Northern Ireland. No one would regard the present position in Northern Ireland as entirely satisfactory constitutionally, but that is not a reflection on the European Community. Nor does it greatly help to underestimate what the Community does and is prepared to do in regional policy throughout the country.

I hope that it will not embarrass the Chancellor of the Exchequer if I say that I have considerable sympathy today with his position. Only a few short months ago he was the jewel in the Prime Minister's crown, even if it were pushed a little to the side. Now he is subject to criticism far and wide and largely from his hon. Friends who at the last Budget loudly supported what he was doing. Therefore, I have genuine sympathy with him in the vicissitudes that he is now undergoing. With his knowledge of financial history he will be among the first to agree that his predecessors since 1945 have, almost without exception, undergone the same vicissitudes. What interests me is not so much a condemnation of what the Labour party has or has not done, but how this present difficulty compares with others in the past. There may well be lessons to be learned from it.

In many ways the problems of the present position are on a higher level than ever before. The present position has arisen with unemployment still at 2·1 million. In November 1973, on the then means of calculating unemployment, it was just over 400,000. The Chancellor smiles, but it is not a matter for smiling. That shows one very different factor in the economy at that time. The scale of our present balance of payments deficit was unknown previously. In 1973 the deficit was £112 million whereas now it is already £12·43 billion. Both those factors emphasise my point that these events are happening on an entirely higher level than previously.

Similarly, we lost 20 per cent. of our industrial base at the beginning of this decade because sterling was allowed to rise far too high in relation to the dollar, as many of us said at the time, and our industry was destroyed. Much of our industry believes that it is in the same position today and that with the continuous increase in interest rates much of it is under threat and will be unable to survive. That undoubtedly applies also to many small firms, some of recent creation. That is a bigger threat than previously and all those matters must be taken into account.

At the end of the Chancellor's speech I found myself asking: "Is this a serious position or is it not? Is it serious or even critical or is it not?" The question is important because, whatever policies the Chancellor follows, he must carry the British people with him. Psychologically, the people of Britain are not prepared for a difficult position, let alone for a crisis. That is obvious from their attitude to consumer purchasing.

House ownership has been affected much more. It is no consolation to those who have taken the advice of the Government and bought their own houses, and whose incomes have been so drastically hit by the increase in mortgage rates, to be told that the value of their houses may have increased. The logical deduction is that they can meet their mortgage repayments only by selling their homes, and for most people that would not be a satisfactory conclusion.

One reason for the acute increase in the price of houses has been the shortage of housing, caused not only by the actions of the Chancellor but by actions stretching back over the decade, with local authorities being unable to maintain the supply of houses, many of which have been sold, rightly, to private owners. Nor have construction firms been building as many houses, often because of the increase in interest rates. That has undoubtedly led to the enormous increase in house prices, which may be stabilised —I doubt whether it will be reduced—by the increase in interest rates. A pattern has been developing during the past few years, and it will take a considerable time to put matters right.

The Chancellor ended his speech by saying that it was a perfectly simple and straightforward problem with a perfectly simple and straightforward answer—put up interest rates. It is difficult to share his simplicity of mind, understanding of and approach to the matter. To me, it is much more complicated.

The Chancellor started by saying that there will be no change in policy. There was a noticeable silence among Conservative Members when he said that. The Chancellor has put himself in a very strict, tight box in which he has only one policy. He has insisted, to the disappointment of many in the country as well as in the House and perhaps in the City, that that policy will continue. In golfing terms, the Chancellor could be described as a one-club man, and that club is interest rates. But if one wishes to take on Sandy Lyle and the rest of the world one needs a complete bag of clubs. The Chancellor flatly refuses to have that. He has turned down any other measures to influence the economy.

One reason why I doubt whether interest rates will have the desired effect is that it has not come home to the people of Britain that this is a critical position about which action must be taken. Interest rates will continue to increase to 14 per cent., and perhaps to 17 per cent.—the highest level under this Government—with all the consequences of damaging investment in our industry. The pound will rise so high that our exports will be damaged. The problem with the balance of payments is caused not only by consumer imports, because we no longer have an industrial base to supply our consumers, but by the loss of exports.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heath: Yes, if my hon. Friend is not trying to break up the show.

Mr. Cash: I would not wish to do that. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the argument about the quality of British industry relates not only to the Treasury but to what industry itself produces? One of our greatest problems is the fact that British industry has not responded to the challenges that have been offered to it during the past 10 years.

Mr. Heath: I would not quarrel with my hon. Friend on that. Some of us have been saying it for even longer. That

[Mr. Heath]

is why I started my speech by saying that present events are happening against the background of problems at a much higher level than they were on each previous occasion on which a Chancellor has faced such vicissitudes.

What is the solution to the problems of British industry and its capacity for exporting? We must not forget that, even when industry is efficient and produces quality goods, its exporting capacity is damaged because of the currency rate.

The Chancellor did not mention the fact that, our interest rates having been increased, the Americans are following——

Mr. Lawson: I did mention it.

Mr. Heath: I am sorry if I did not hear the Chancellor make that point. Perhaps I was making a note of his other points.

It is important to ask how much the Americans will have to increase their interest rates to deal with their problems. The Chancellor seemed to be comparatively happy with the American problems. But I doubt whether anyone would wish to be in Mr. George Bush's position now, let alone the position that he will occupy in January, with a budget deficit of that size and a soaring balance of payments problem. It is a terrifying thought that we are entering a currency and interest rate race with the Americans.

Although the Chancellor does not wish to agree with me, I believe that the position is critical. He wants to tell the country, "Keep your nerve and everything will be all right." That is incorrect. To get the country to respond to the measures that must be taken it must be told that the position is critical. The Chancellor must become a full-set-of-golf-clubs man and must use measures in addition to interest rates. For example, I see no difficulty in reducing the credit that is provided. The City believes that and all the experts agree. One can deal with any form of credit if one has the will.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): We are all grateful to my right hon. Friend for being here today and for the consolidating effect that his speech has had on the Conservative Benches. In the absence of exchange controls, which existed when he was Prime Minister but which do not exist today—nor, given his enthusiasm for Europe, would he wish to reintroduce them—how could he make those credit controls effective?

Mr. Heath: Through our banking system—certainly for ordinary credit card holders and consumers. I shall be told that that affects only 5 per cent. of credit, but in these circumstances 5 per cent. is important. The availability of credit is increasing quickly, and the Chancellor cannot dismiss the fact lightly. Most credit card holders would not have a clue what interest they pay on their cards. Some of them might be aggrieved if they knew the rate that they must pay. Credit is an important factor in consumer purchases, which the Chancellor has said he wants to reduce.

The Chancellor said that we have an enormous budget surplus. That is true, but for years we have urged that that money be directed to the infrastructure, which does not cause great import demand and is only the first stage towards consumption. But the infrastructure has been neglected. The south is overcrowded and the north is not, because regional policy has been deliberately neglected.

The country must be warned that it will take a considerable time to resolve the problems. We cannot use only higher interest rates, because when the rates start to take effect we shall have a smaller industrial base, higher unemployment and, because of the level of our currency, our exports will have disappeared. That has been the process in the past and there is no reason to doubt that there will be a repetition of that process in the next few months.

My last comment is about Europe, which has already been mentioned. We must take action over Europe. We cannot go on with a situation in which so much misinformation is being provided to this country about the European Community. Of course there are opponents in the Opposition and on the Government side, but we are indissolubly linked to the other members of the Community by treaty and by the Single European Act, which was ratified by the House. Our job is to make it work. That is what the other member states expect of us. In the worst situation, in which we are not prepared to go along with 1992, the others will go themselves.

Let us look at the position of the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England about establishing a European central bank and a European single currency. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor knows that these things are inextricably bound up with one market. *[Interruption.]* With respect to my right hon. Friend; I shall argue it out with him at any time.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Why not now?

Mr. Heath: Because I am allowed only 10 minutes.

The other countries of the Community are determined on this step and they will go ahead. One can say that this needs legal sanction and a unanimous vote, but there are many ways by which they can achieve those ends without a unanimous vote and without alteration of the treaty. If they want to have their central bank, they will have it, and we shall suffer. These matters are to the detriment of Britain but not to the detriment of the other members of the Community. We must accept that basic fact.

I repeat my request to the Chancellor, who is chuckling away at the happy situation in which he finds himself. We are heading for a £15 billion trade deficit this year and we shall probably have a £14 billion or £15 billion trade deficit next year. That is the happy situation. Perhaps he or his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would take some occasion to explain in detail their exact objections to becoming a full member of the European monetary system. At no time have they been prepared to explain to their colleagues in the Community or to the House why they refuse to join. The answer has always been, "When the time is right." The pound was up to $2·42 and down to $1·05 and showed proportionate changes against other currencies. To be "right", do the Government want the pound to be worth more than $2·42 or less than $1·05? Perhaps the Chancellor could answer that question quite simply when he is winding up. It is disgraceful and an insult to the House that on a major issue such as this for over 10 years neither the Prime Minister nor two

Chancellors of the Exchequer have ever been prepared to give their reasons, which could be fully discussed and debated in the House.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the right hon. Gentleman not recall that the Prime Minister has given one reason, which is that full membership of the EMS would tie us in to a dangerously deflationary German strategy?

Mr. Heath: I understand that that is what the Chancellor wants. The Chancellor has said that his one golf club is devoted to deflation, to stopping inflation. At one time he wanted to get it down to nil. We have heard a little less about that recently. Full membership of the EMS is essential and I should like to add one political factor. How can we expect the other members of the Community to co-operate with us in what we want in outside affairs? We have a row with the Belgian Government over alleged terrorism. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I thought that we believed that people were innocent until they were found guilty.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My right hon. Friend does not believe that about the Prime Minister.

Mr. Heath: We have differences with other countries, for example, with the Republic of Ireland. Other countries will not respond if we are not prepared to co-operate with them in the bigger matters of the European Community, on which their whole life depends. I know that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is politically insensitive and has no idea of how other members of the Community feel when they find that we are first trying to destroy them and then trying to destroy the Community. It is well seen by the Community and I understand that it was said last night on television by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), that many hon. Members want a free trade area and not a community. There is an essential and vital difference between a community and a free trade area. We had a free trade area and it did not serve our purpose. That is why we went into the Community.

Mr. Tebbit: After a moment's thought, my right hon. Friend will want to change slightly what he said a few moments ago. He said, or certainly implied, that the attitude of the Irish Republic or Belgium about the extradition of suspected terrorists was conditioned in some way by Britain's attitude towards the EMS. I am sure that my right hon. Friend did not mean that and I am absolutely sure that it is not true. I should like him to make it clear that he did not mean that.

Mr. Heath: I meant exactly what I said. The attitude of countries is affected psychologically by how other countries behave towards them, and anybody with experience of international politics knows that full well.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): My right hon. Friend is in danger of injuring his own reputation. Is he really seeking to say that Britain's failure to join the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS is some kind of justification for the refusal of the Belgian Government to respond to our request for the extradition of Mr. Ryan?

Mr. Heath: I am not in any way saying that it is a justification, but that it is an explanation of the attitude of many other countries towards us when they find that we are not co-operating with them. That psychology spreads and affects their other activities. My hon. Friend ought to know that.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend consider what he has said? He said that we were not co-operating with the Belgians. Can he tell us what we did when we were asked to extradite the football hooligans who were at the Heysel stadium?

Mr. Heath: My hon. Friend should look at the campaign carried on as a result of our actions by the British press about the Belgian constitutional and legal systems.

The important thing is to concentrate on the Chancellor's position about the European Community. Again I strongly urge him at least to explain his position, even if he will not reconsider it. He should explain why he continues to stay outside the European monetary system at a time when the use of the ecu is expanding in the City. The banking system wants to go in and recognises that the City of London will not be able to hold its position unless Britain is a full member of the European monetary system. I do not want him to come along and lament that the Community has gone ahead on its own and done it without us. In the words of some members, "Well, if you want to stay outside and be a second-rate state on a second-rate tier, that is up to you. We shall go ahead." That is clearly the mood at the moment, and I want my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to recognise that. Unless he does, our interests will be gravely damaged.

5.20 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) had some sympathy for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I do not know about sympathy, but I think that most of us will have some understanding of the dilemma in which the Chancellor finds himself. The problem now facing both him and the economy is that we have reached the end of the go part of the stop-go cycle. It has been a very long go. Stop-go cycles are usually of a much shorter duration. This is a historically long one, and it has lasted for about five or six years, depending on one's definition. It has lasted longer than any previous cycle because of North sea oil. The oil allowed us to carry on the go part of the stop-go cycle to such an extent.

What has happened is that this stop has marked the end of the hopes that some of us had that North sea oil would be used beneficially for manufacturing industry—the only use of that money that would have produced abiding rewards for our country rather than the short-lived ones of consumerism or remittances obtained for sending oil money abroad. As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said, the problem now is a familiar one in our post-war economy, but it is a much bigger one. We have to address ourselves to how we control this big expansion of credit and this consumer boom.

When the Chancellor talked about a blip, he did a disservice to the important argument and discussions facing us today. It is incomprehensible to talk about a blip of £12 billion to £14 billion, or maybe even £15 billion. In 1964, we had an £800 million balance of payments deficit. If we exclude capital inflows, it was about £360 million. That is equivalent in real terms to something far below anything in which we are engaged today. It took from 1964

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

to 1969, and a sterling devaluation, to correct that deficit, which is small by today's standards. Nobody could have called that a soft landing. Indeed, it was a particularly hard one. The soft landing for a balance of payments deficit of the size that we have now, of previously unimaginable proportions, is likely to take longer still unless certain measures are taken.

According to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the deficit should not have been there at all. His policy, through monetarism and reduction in the PSBR, would bring about the solutions to all our economic problems. The Chancellor now seems to believe, or did until recently, that excessive private expenditure is less serious than high public expenditure. However, he has responsibility for the economy as a whole, whether the spending is private or public. It is not less serious because there is a bigger import content in private expenditure than in public expenditure.

Just to take responsibility for public expenditure and leave private spending to take care of itself is wholly wrong, because the Chancellor knew in March of the problems with which he was being faced. He knew certain of the difficulties of the credit expansion, for example, and if he had considered the possibility of the £4,000 million of balance of payments deficit, which he predicted then, turning into £15,000 million, would he still have made those tax cuts? It is my belief that he made those tax cuts because he thought that early in the life of this Parliament was the only opportunity he would have to effect tax cuts during his time as Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was a miscalculation. There has been a huge expansion of credit, and mortgage relief, which now costs £4·5 billion, is an important element of that credit expansion. The Chancellor says that mortgage relief ought not to be in the retail price index, but he does not take into account the enormous inflation in house prices, which does not show in the retail price index. That is one of the major aspects of inflation.

The Chancellor said in Southport on Saturday 26 November:

> "We have never never run away from difficult decisions."

A U-turn is a difficult decision, but it is a political decision. It only causes embarrassment. What we need is an economic decision to deal with our economic problems, and those problems stare us in the face. What we need most of all is an autumn Budget. The Chancellor, and the rest of the Government, have scorned all past autumn Budgets, but when there is something unforeseen, one needs an autumn Budget. The Chancellor said that this was unforeseen. If it is unforeseen, that is the case for an autumn Budget. He is prevented from introducing an autumn Budget because of the statement that he has made so frequently and because of the obstinacy and obduracy that the Government have shown in this matter.

I thought that we might have been able to stretch on until the spring, but it seems to me that we cannot wait that long. We need to take action immediately. In the past, one might have been able to deal with the matter by imposing quotas on imports and other such measures, but those options are not available to us today, so we must look at the various possibilities of which we are able to make use. They are fairly restricted—taxation or a monetary squeeze.

As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said, credit controls have limitations. One cannot do everything through credit controls, but one can make some use of them. The Chancellor said that credit controls were unfair to those who did not have the economic expertise to deal with such matters. It was a touching regard for the unsophisticated, which came oddly from his lips. One can take some action. National savings have for decades been making money from the unworldly people who put money into them. We need some sort of action—limited but valuable, and a useful addition to the kind of controls that might help to reduce the amount of credit in circulation. Hire purchase restrictions and other measures are all options that have been used in the past and they can have some effect.

Then there is taxation. There is nothing to stop the Chancellor using the regulator in an autumn Budget; a budget surplus, which he has enjoyed does not eliminate the need to slow down the economy by other means than interest rates. The give-away to the wealthy did not just mean the £2 billion to £3 billion to them. It generated the view and created the climate among those who benefited and among many others that happy days were here and would stay here, and they went out and spent and spent, and spent much more than they were given in any tax relief.

We need to ensure that we have a clear decision, made by Parliament, that there will be a reduction in the amount of money available to people. Interest rates do not provide that. Interest rates hurt industry, whose investment has to compete with the return from lending money which has jumped from 7·5 per cent. to 13 per cent., and industry has to compete with the banks, who charge businesses 15 to 16 per cent. on the money that they want to invest. Which business can get such a return from investment? The major competitors of many industries are the banks, because one can get a better return from banks than from investing in industry. That is one of the serious consequences.

When the APR on consumer credit is 27 or 28 per cent., a 1 per cent. increase means very little, even if people know about it, as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said. If people know about it, what does an extra 1 per cent. mean? To investors, it means something. We also have the problem of a failure to invest at a time when there is an economic downsurge. That is the major problem facing us.

High interest rates intended to deter consumption push up the value of the pound. There is no targeting of any of this, but the two go together, and each of them is a deterrent to British manufacturing industry. High interest rates bear upon people's expenditure, the pound goes up and we then have difficulty in obtaining exports, and great difficulty in investment at home.

We have here the classic situation that we had in 1979-81. There is the danger of repetition of something that burnt into my soul, because it transformed the reasonably prosperous town of Ashton-under-Lyne into a town which is far less prosperous today. We are one of the towns that depend very much on small manufacturing industry. We lost 30 per cent. of that manufacturing industry. Small firms, medium-sized firms and medium-tech firms were destroyed by those policies. The demand is now there, but we do not have the capacity or even the industries to meet it. We cannot recreate those industries when the demand returns. The consequence is that we now have to import their goods. With the damage caused by the high pound, import penetration is made easier and home sales are reduced. That is the situation that we face.

At six o'clock on Saturday 26 November, on Radio 4, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that the

> "British economy is very strong indeed."

That is one of the most crass remarks that I have heard in my economic experience. We are weak industrially, weak in manufacturing industry and weak in responding to levels of demand that we should have been well capable of meeting. We are squeezed at home and abroad.

The medicine that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is prescribing is the same kind of medicine, under much harsher conditions, that was tried between 1979 and 1981. It was a poison then and it is a poison now. There is only one realistic solution for the Chancellor. He should remove his pride from his now threadbare cloak and bring in an autumn Budget.

5.31 pm

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford) : I am sure that I was not the only hon. Member today who felt a great deal of sadness that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was still too unwell to join us in our debates. We miss him. A Labour Member has just said that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was rather glad that he was not here. I suppose that that could be true in view of the mess that the latest yuppie on the Opposition Front Bench made of his chance to play understudy to his right hon. and learned Friend. I thought that it was perhaps just my perception, but I am glad to know that it was perceived by some Opposition Members.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tebbit: I shall not give way.

Mr. Ewing: Just for a moment?

Mr. Tebbit: I am terribly sorry, but no.

With inflation on the rise and the deficit on our trading account, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) must have thought that he had the luck to be the first Labour economic spokesman for years to have the opportunity in a debate to have a little straw with which to make his bricks. Unfortunately, he dropped them all even before he had finished making them.

The one thing that I found particularly odd about the hon. Gentleman's speech was his reluctance to give way when he could have been corrected and prevented from making some of his mistakes. In his litany of forthcoming price increases next spring, he referred to increases in Telecom prices. I wonder whether he was aware that the basket of main charges for Telecom has been frozen for the past two years and will remain frozen until August of next year at the very least. When he returns to the Chamber, perhaps he will tell us whether he knew that and when it last happened under a Labour Government or whether it ever happened while the industry was nationalised.

The hon. Gentleman was agitated about inflation. Some of us with longer political memories than his remember that double-digit inflation was a Socialist innovation. Indeed, during the term of the last Labour Government, the RPI rose by 112·3 per cent. in just over six years. This Government have been in office for nine and a half years and the increase in prices is 10 per cent. less than that. When we discuss inflation with Front-Bench Opposition Members, those discussions might at least contain a little humility.

The hon. Gentleman forgot to tell us when the last Labour Government achieved an inflation rate that was lower than the rate about which he was complaining today. I suspect that he forgot to tell us because he could not find the figures in the book.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tebbit: If the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, I shall treat him with the courtesy with which his hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East treated me.

On the balance of payments, Labour was in deficit every year except one. By the 10th anniversary of this Government, they will have been in surplus for seven years out of 10. What is more, Labour also achieved huge budget deficits whereas my right hon. Friend is achieving substantial surpluses.

However, the hon. Gentleman's speech was devalued because it was so heavy and over the top on forecasts of disaster and so light on firm policy proposals. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) made three clear points as policy recommendations. We did not hear one from Labour Front-Bench Members. We could perhaps with advantage bring back some of the old men and get rid of some of the young ones.

I have looked back at past debates on the Loyal Address. There is a strong similarity in Opposition speeches over the years with one exception: today there is even less effort than ever before to pose an alternative strategy. In May 1979 the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) opened the debate in the light of the first of the three Labour election defeats. He ended his speech with a good question. He said:

> "the policies to which the right hon. Lady committed herself at the time of the election were tried by her predecessor and failed. Why does she expect to succeed where the right hon. Member for Sidcup (Mr. Heath) was forced to admit failure within 18 months?"—[*Official Report*, 22 May 1979; Vol. 967, c. 891.]

That is a good question that we might all consider. Perhaps the best replies could be put in over Christmas to one of those contests in the Sunday papers.

It was only a week earlier than that that Mr. Callaghan, as he then was, had observed:

> "This period of Tory rule will be a brief interruption, and then we shall resume the march forward"—[*Official Report*, 15 May 1979; Vol. 967, c. 73.]

—in his case, a march forward to the House of Lords. By November 1981, Mr. Silkin, winding up for the Opposition, said:

> "Import controls and massive public investment are one way.
>
> . . . Here again the Labour party has a unanimous belief that exchange controls ought to be dealt with, and used in our favour."—[*Official Report*, 11 November 1981; Vol. 12, c. 617.]

We have not heard those remedies today, so there has at least been some progress in that Opposition Members have no policies rather than those policies. I do not know whether they still share Mr. Silkin's wish, which he expressed that night, that he wanted to restore the top rate of tax to 83 per cent., or whether they wish to restore it to only 60 per cent. However, either way, it is unlikely to happen.

[Mr. Tebbit]

In November 1982, the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) opened the debate, full of gloom for the economy and optimism for Labour, which were both falsified. Abusing my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), just as he has been abused today, the right hon. Gentleman said:

> "Who can fail to forget the scream of bubbling optimism that issued from the Chief Secretary in speech after speech throughout the winter and spring of this year, culminating in his famous assertion that he could see signs of recovery everywhere? . . . The truth is that on present policies, reinforced by the attacks on the publicly-owned industries, there will not be 'a sustainable growth in output' . . . and there will be no reduction . . . in the number out of work."—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1982; Vol. 3[illegible] 560–63.]

The right hon. Gentleman has been proved substantially wrong.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney) *rose*——

Mr. Tebbit: Of course I am willing to give way to him.

Mr. Shore: I think that the right hon. Gentleman will agree with me on two points. First, there was no reduction in unemployment between 1982 and 1986. That was a four-year period in which unemployment was around the 3 million mark. Secondly, not even in 1986 had we recovered to the same level of manufacturing output in our industry that we had in 1979.

Mr. Lawson: That is not true.

Mr. Tebbit: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer says, part of the right hon. Gentleman's intervention was not true. Secondly, he has not met my point, which is that he said that on the policies to which he referred there would be no reduction of unemployment. In fact, there has been a long, continuous and substantial reduction in unemployment.

It is time that a touch of realism was introduced into our debates and I should like to help to introduce it. I shall quote Lord Prior, who was interviewed recently on the BBC. He finished by saying:

> "As things are at the moment, I think that the economy is overheated. I think the Chancellor's measures will help to bring it back under control. I'm a supporter of the Chancellor in what he is seeking to do. It will now take time to come round and I don't think we can look for instant results and I would expect high interest rates to be with us until the middle of next year."

Lord Prior was speaking, I think, as the chairman of one of the largest manufacturing companies in Britain, not as a politician. Contrary to what has been suggested by the Opposition, there is considerable confidence both in the economy and in the conduct of the economy by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer by those who are at the sharp end of business, as opposed to those who would not recognise the blunt end of most businesses. As the House will know, I am a director of four major public companies and one private company.

It is possible to criticise any Chancellor of the Exchequer; none of them gets everything right. Indeed, before 1979, some of them managed to get everything wrong. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup suggested that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is a one-club golfer and that he should get some more clubs. I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup that the most important thing is to be able to play the game and to have a proven handicap that is better than that of any of the other players in this place for a start.

In the real world, industry and commerce are not in seething discontent. Of course, not everything is perfect. Most of us, except importers, would like sterling to be a bit lower, except when we are buying in foreign components, semi-finished goods or raw materials, when we would like it to be a bit higher. Most of us would like interest rates to be a bit lower. However, the difference in United Kingdom costs from those of our competitors arising from interest rate differentials has proven to be rather less on the whole than the difference arising from differentials in the unit cost of labour. We have made great progress in increasing productivity and holding down unit labour costs, but so have our competitors. I had hoped that there would be some common ground between us all on that, but, sadly, that is not so.

It would have been pleasing recently to hear trade union leaders, whose members have done well in recent years, taking the lead in seeking further ways to cut the costs of industry, not to inflate them. Perhaps whoever replies for the Opposition will say whether the Opposition believe that pay settlements that are well above the retail prices index are benign or damaging to the interests of the economy, or even to those who gain them, unless they are fully justified by productivity advances.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): How much productivity has the right hon. Gentleman given?

Mr. Tebbit: Sufficient to convince my colleagues who hold responsibility for businesses that it is worth while to employ me. The hon. Gentleman is free to apply for a job and to ascertain whether anyone wants to employ him.

What are the effects of the increase in interest rates that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has introduced? In my experience, retail sales have slowed sharply but not uniformly, and that is exactly what we should expect. Monthly outgoings for a first-time buyer have increased by about 35 per cent., so the froth is certainly off the house market. Many mortgagors are only just beginning to pay the higher rates, and many will not do so until the new year or even later. The slowdown in retail sales is therefore skewed towards more up-market goods as those other than mortgagors are still enjoying the tax cuts of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and are little affected by the increase in interest rates.

Most people do not borrow money on their credit cards, or certainly not into the interest rate range. The majority of card holders clear their account at the end of the month. As my right hon. Friend has said, credit cards are not the major problem of credit control. The major problem of credit expansion has been in lending through building societies and banks. We all know that from the letters that we receive from our building societies in which the society offers to lend us another £5,000 or so for anything we want, such as a holiday abroad or consumer goods. That is where the leakage of cash is to be found.

The boom in the construction industry is still going ahead. It is taking place on the impetus of events before the summer. Undoubtedly there will be a considerable cooling off in that industry next year. From now on my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer must be extremely careful in his use of further interest rate changes, because what he has done already has probably wound a quite powerful deflationary spring. The full effect of past increases in rates has not yet been felt and it may be that it has not been enough. We do not yet know. On the other hand, it would be easy to pile on too much further pressure and then find that the force of the deflationary spring is too great.

All that underlines the fact that the Opposition are hopelessly wrong in their prescriptions, such as they are. If the tax cuts were withdrawn, presumably the Opposition would want not an ever larger Budget surplus but an increase in public spending, much of it putting more spending power into the hands of those who are least likely to be savers, or into non-wealth creating or even wealth-destroying schemes.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made a trenchant defence of his record and his policy. On form as a Chancellor, and on his handicap in this economic game, he has no equal, certainly not in the House. The Opposition have advanced no alternative policies that we can consider. Presumably that is because those that they cooked up at the SOGAT rest home—how singularly appropriate that it was SOGAT of all unions —were the result of discussing how to improve the supply side of the economy. SOGAT! Oh dear, what ironies we find in the Opposition's actions. Despite that meeting, they have no policies that they yet dare to disclose.

On the record of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and on his policies, he has already won the debate. He has won the support of his party and that of a far wider constituency in addition. He has won especially the support of those who are running industry instead of running it down.

5.48 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) seemed to have full recourse to his notes as he gave a commentary on what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said earlier this afternoon. It was clearly based on what he had decided to say before the debate began. There was a sting in the tail when the right hon. Gentleman said that the piling on of further interest rate increases, should that be indicated to the Chancellor by further trade deficit problems, which we may well have, could cause serious problems to industry. In a rather more generous way than some other Conservative Members the right hon. Gentleman is giving a not proven verdict. It was the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), who chairs the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, who said that the jury was out, considering its verdict on the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

It is an unusual Gracious Speech debate that turns into a confidence debate on the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Ten days ago, it seemed that it would focus on the Chancellor's animadversions on the pensioners. Within a few days a new subject for a confidence debate had been spawned, following the latest trade figures. The message that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has given to Conservative Members is that there will be no change in policy, that "What we shall do will be unpopular" and that "It is all very simple and it will be all right in the end." Those are the key points of the message. The Chancellor of the Exchequer's forecasting record is sufficiently bad for me not to want to concede too much to him. He is right in predicting that what the Government will do will be unpopular. It may be that there will be no change, but it is certainly not simple. To talk about it all being simple was a surprising observation for him to make. I do not believe that everything will turn out all right in the end.

The measure of how far the Chancellor has got it wrong is provided in his Budget speech in March 1988. He said:

> "inflation is forecast to end the year at 4 per cent. While this is still too high, it is a testimony to the soundness of our policies that the present strong and sustained upswing . . . has not led to any resurgence of inflation."

Last month inflation rose to 6·4 per cent. and it is unlikely to keep within the Autumn Statement forecast for an average of 6·25 per cent. in the last quarter of 1988. *[Interruption.]* I see that not only is the jury out, but the defendant is out as well. The Chancellor is leaving the proceedings as he is unable to bear it any longer.

The last Gracious Speech referred to:

> "Policies designed further to reduce inflation."—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1987; Vol. 118, c. 39.]

In this Gracious Speech we are only promised policies designed to "bear down on inflation". I do not know what the phrase "bear down" means. If my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mr. Smith) was "bearing down" perhaps there would be some prospect of inflation actually going down. However, the idea of "bearing down" on inflation as a substitute for further reducing it seems to be an index of how far the Government's targets have slipped.

Later in his Budget speech the Chancellor said:

> "the current account of the balance of payments is forecast to remain in deficit this year, by some £4 billion, . . . I foresee no difficulty in financing a temporary current account deficit of this scale."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 1988; Vol. 129, c. 996.]

Of course, the reality is that after the worst ever figures we are heading for a deficit of £12 billion or perhaps £14 billion in the current year and hence the high interest rates.

When speaking to the Treasury Select Committee in March, the Chancellor said

> "I am not concerned about overheating in the economy, though one has to be vigilant all the time."

In March, we had a strategy of massive tax cuts against a background of the explosion of credit opportunities which the deregulation had brought about. That created a spending climate. The right hon. Member for Chingford referred to the kind of letters that banks are sending out. It is really quite extraordinary to read what has been sent out in recent months. The post boxes and doormats around the country are littered with computerised letters from banks. I have an example with me from the National Girobank which is still a publicly owned body, although the Government are trying hard to sell it. The letter states:

> "Do you need money right away?
>
> Like most people, you can probably afford to increase your monthly outgoings because of tax cuts made in the Budget last March. So why not use the extra to improve your lifestyle? After all, you've worked hard for it."

How do they know?

> "Maybe you would like to replace your car . . . splash out on a new bedroom or kitchen . . . enjoy a luxury holiday . . . or treat yourself to something really special."

An accompanying circular states:

> "Yes you can replace your car . . . you can afford that fitted kitchen . . . you can take a well deserved holiday . . .
>
> With a Girobank Personal Loan, you can say goodbye to window shopping and buy the things you want right now."

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

We have all received stacks of those letters. People all over the country have received such material and, along with the tax cuts, these letters create a spending climate. *[Interruption.]* I must state that I have never paid a penny in interest on a credit card nor have I responded to the invitations from the National Girobank.

The effect of all this is that tax cuts began to fuel consumer spending before the money was in people's pockets. They had that effect before the cuts fed through into pay packets and the effect has continued. Alongside that, there was an abandonment of any real monetary strategy. The only monetary target now referred to is M0, which does not even involve the bank loans or other means of consumer credit. That is a recipe for inflation by anybody's reckoning. That is classic text book, demand-led inflation. Too much money is chasing too few home-produced goods. That problem will now be compounded by the Chancellor's measures feeding through wage bargaining.

The Chancellor is trying to be a post-Keynesian by downgrading demand management to something which he believes is not an essential responsibility of Government. In fact, he has turned himself into a pre-Keynesian by ignoring the effect of fiscal policy on demand in the economy. We are now paying the price for that, and what a price. There have been crippling increases for home buyers, especially those in the south-east, who, because of high house prices, have had to lay out very large sums of money and are committed to the hilt. There has also been a further twist to next year's inflation spiral. I do not know how the Chancellor can say that that is not inflation as other countries understand it. In this country it is Government policy hugely to increase home ownership and in this country home ownership depends on mortgages. Therefore, for many people inflation is drastically affected by the level of house prices and interest rates.

Along with all that there is a potentially serious restraint on investment, especially in smaller businesses. The right hon. Member for Chingford referred to the chairman of GEC. They both speak from the vantage point of being members of the largest companies who, as a result of their exchange rate activities, are best able to insulate themselves from these problems and whose cash flow is the most comfortable at the moment. However, many medium-sized and smaller businesses and many innovative businesses are facing the greatest difficulties in investment in the present circumstances.

There will be short-term upward pressure on sterling which threatens the competitiveness of manufacturing industry. The Chancellor's forecasts are suffused with optimism. I believe that there will be a much larger trade deficit than the Chancellor predicts, that there will be lower output growth than he hopes for and that all this could actually take us to a sterling crisis. It is such a dangerous mix that, rather than be advised from the Opposition Benches to resign, the Chancellor might do well to take that job in the City now and not be around when it all comes to the boil.

The Chancellor is arrogantly unrepentant. The key passage in the Gracious Speech states that public expenditure will continue to fall

"as a proportion of national income, thus providing scope for further reductions in taxation, as and when prudent."

Presumably the Chancellor thought that major tax reductions were prudent in the spring which does not say much for his grasp of prudence. He is like someone convicted of driving through red lights who causes a serious accident and who says to the court, "I'll do it again whenever I think it's prudent to go through the red light." That is the message in the Gracious Speech.

What measures could the Chancellor take now to have some effect on the crisis which would make him less dependent on interest rates? First, he could make it quite clear that there will be no income tax cuts next spring unless there is a major turn-round in the economy which none of us, not even he, is now predicting. If he finds any scope to cut the burden of taxes, he could look to employers' national insurance contributions and offer some relief on savings. If he feels it necessary, there are some areas in which he could make useful changes.

Secondly, he could take urgent measures to boost savings. It is evident that high interest rates by themselves have not prevented us from having a very bad savings ratio. He should stop dropping hints about means testing pensioners' benefits. That leads people to believe that saving is not worth while. I am sure that Conservative Members find, as I find, constituents coming to them saying that they have saved all their life but now find that the little bit in the bank stops them getting help even to insulate the loft, let alone receiving benefits being received by people who in reality are better off than them. Many of my elderly constituents have told me that.

The Chancellor is creating a spending climate which does not support saving. He should reverse that and go further by looking for new tax reliefs which offer opportunities to people whom the personal equity plan scheme will not reach. There are opportunities for a much wider range of personal savings designed to shift that adverse savings ratio.

Thirdly, the Chancellor could call in the credit-giving institutions to discuss how credit expansion can be restrained so as to avoid the necessity for cumbersome, uneven and inequitable credit controls. I am no enthusiast for credit controls and I share some of the Chancellor's misgivings about their effectiveness. However, it must be said that credit controls which have some uneven effects might in some circumstances be better than none at all even if their effect was incomplete. However, that is not a measure I would like the country to adopt if we can possibly avoid it. Let us start talking. Let us see the Chancellor and the Bank of England talking to the banks and credit-giving institutions about the kind of nonsense that I read to the House earlier and the high pressure to borrow and spend. Otherwise those institutions may find themselves talking to the Chancellor about cumbersome and highly inconvenient credit control arrangements which the Chancellor may have to devise as an emergency measure.

Fourthly, the Chancellor could show some evidence that he is starting on some of the major long-term tasks that are woefully absent from the Gracious Speech. There should be real efforts about skill training, research and development, investment, improvement in labour mobility and an attack on the regional maldistribution in the economy. He should embark on tax and benefit integration, which will help to ensure that benefits are directed to those who most need them and ensure that they are taken up. He should address, like the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), the question of the European monetary system. The Chancellor is making it harder to get Britain into it at the moment. It was ironic that the Prime Minister's only stated reason earlier for Britain not entering the exchange rate mechanism was that the Germans might force us to press down more firmly on inflation than the British Government would want. That is an extraordinary argument for us to have been kept out of the exchange rate mechanism for so long.

Then I want to see the Chancellor attacking monopoly instead of creating more and more and transferring it from the public to the private sector virtually unscathed, as has been the Government's record. Attacking monopoly is one way of attacking inflation, because monopoly is one of the means by which unrealistically high prices are sustained.

I should like to see the Government embarking on many of the wider long-term measures that have economic importance, to which our amendment refers. We have tried to set out some alternatives, a task for which we are equipped. The official Opposition, on their own admission, got it wrong at the election. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), in a paper which seems to have gained wider circulation than he intended, said:

> "Before the last election we were vulnerable to the charge that by proposing to raise public spending as a means of reducing unemployment, we were ready to take risks with inflation and the balance of payments."

The hon. Gentleman is now engaged on a perfectly proper and honourable search for alternative measures to those that the Labour party advanced at the election. The problem that he faces is that they have no real ideological base. If he shifts away from the ideological basis on which the Labour party is founded, he will have some difficulty in finding an alternative. That is why I feel much more comfortable advocating policies based on the individual in a free society and in a free market, policies that build on the capacity of individuals to work together to build a fairer society and stronger communities and to obtain a cleaner environment, if those individuals and communities are given power and responsibility.

A primarily collectivist society is not a worthwhile or electable alternative. Ours is, and it is the only viable alternative to the most centralising and arrogant Government in modern British history. It is not just the Chancellor who deserves to go, it is the whole lot, some of them on the ground that they have allowed their Government to bring in measures in which they cannot possibly believe. I urge the House to support the amendment in the name of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

6.1 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): I agree with the criticism made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that he made no alternative suggestion about how our economy could be improved.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) drew our attention to 1973. But, as has been pointed out before, after the U-turn, 1973 did not help our economy much at all. In fact, it subsequently led to our defeat. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend is not here, but he may have noticed that during his speech most of his support came from the Opposition rather than the Conservative Benches.

The Labour party's remedy is more taxation. That is always its stance. There is no question but that these were unexpected trade figures and they need more analysis because there must be statistical distortions. High imports, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has pointed out on many occasions, are caused not by the Government but by the private sector. There is tooling-up and restocking and last month's figures could have been affected slightly by the postal strike. However, having said all that, the figures are still high and some, including the City, are not sure whether our figures are accurate.

We cannot run the deficit too long, but, as has been pointed out, it is sustainable. At the moment, our gold and dollar reserves are approaching £30 billion and our overseas assets, which have been largely built up since 1979, are approaching the £100 billion mark. There is no crisis, as Opposition Members try to point out. The Opposition and the media have played up the matter, certainly the debate, out of all proportion to the facts of the case.

To a certain extent the deficit is being financed by money coming in from overseas and that shows that the foreigner, if not the Opposition, has confidence in Britain's economy.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South) *rose*——

Sir William Clark: No, I shall not give way. We have been asked to be brief, so if the hon. Gentleman will excuse me I would rather not give way.

As has been pointed out, the latest increase in interest rates has slowed down high street sales. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford that the effects of the latest increase must come through the pipeline. Imports ordered today do not arrive for another two or three months and it is only then that we shall know the figures. There is no question but that the property boom has been stopped, but consumer spending has not. I agree that consumer spending has not been sufficiently curtailed. Consequently, the Chancellor was right to increase the base rate from 12 per cent. to 13 per cent.

It is all very well Opposition Members, and, indeed, some of my hon. Friends, criticising the Chancellor. It is easy to criticise with hindsight. If each of us knew yesterday what we know today, we should all be millionaires. It is easy to know the answer after the event. At the time of the Budget, as the Chancellor has tacitly admitted, future growth in the United Kingdom was miscalculated. Because of that, Britain is now suffering not the "stagflation" that we suffered under the previous Labour Government and successive Labour Governments but "boomflation". *[Interruption.]* It is easy for Opposition Members to smile and laugh.

I regret that my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup did not mention one good thing about our economy. He did not mention our production, investment, standard of living and the profitability of companies being up and unemployment being down. Such things should be said by a leading statesman such as my right hon. Friend. Consequently, when he makes such a speech it does our economy and our standing in the world no good at all. In fact, the underlying strength of our economy is the envy of the rest of the world and I and most people are convinced——

Dr. Bray *rose*——

Sir William Clark: No, I shall not give way. I do not have time.

We must also remember that inflation is down from 25 or 26 per cent., but, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, it is creeping up and it will probably creep up a bit more. As he rightly points out, if we were to take the tax and prices index, the inflation rate would not be 6·4 per cent., but about 4·5 per cent. If mortgage interest was taken out, it would probably be down to just over 3 per cent. I mention that because Britain's inflation rate and RPI are often compared with those in Germany, France, and so on. If we are going to make such comparisons, they should be on the same basis.

Opposition Members talk about credit controls, but, as has been said, how would we have credit controls without exchange control? Should we reintroduce exchange control or hire purchase control? I remind the House that we have been down that path before but it led us only to the International Monetary Fund. Interest policy is one arm in the fight against inflation. We should not borrow to spend. However, as has been pointed out, my right hon. Friend could consider the position of those in the community who do not have to borrow to spend because they have money. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) touched upon the question of saving. The Government and the Chancellor have a first-class record on the business expansion scheme, PEPs, and so on but the savings ratio has gone down. One has only to look at recent statistics to see that.

I must ask my right hon. Friend the Chancellor: "Why cannot we encourage people not to spend the money they already have in their pockets?" I should like more and more pressure to be applied. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced individual pensions which are a great boon to people and the business expansion scheme is a first-class success. If we could copy something like loi monory, we could give those in the middle income bracket the opportunity to save. I know that would cost money but my right hon. Friend is in a position that enables him to be flexible.

I, as most hon. Members know, am a low tax person. I like low taxes, the lower the better. There is one fact that has never been effectively explained to me. If my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer allows me, as he did in the previous Budget, to keep more of my earnings —for which I was most grateful as were we all—and I then spend that money, that is inflationary. However, if I say to the Chancellor, "You keep it, you spend it for me" that is non-inflationary. I cannot see the difference between me spending the money and my right hon. Friend spending it for me. Although I have the greatest admiration for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, I shall not let him spend any of my money if I can help it.

The Labour party has now, belatedly, become the champion of the owner-occupier—what hypocrisy. When the sale of council houses was introduced not one Opposition Member wanted it. Up and down the country, especially in areas with Left-wing councils, every obstacle in the world was put in the way of council house tenants buying their own houses.

There has been a lot of talk about mortgages. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said that if mortgage repayments go up and the value of the house goes up, one can only pay the mortgage by selling the house. That is not so and I was surprised to hear him say it. If one has a mortgage and does not want to increase the monthly repayments, practically any building society in the country will give permission to extend the life of the mortgage. If it runs for 20 years it can be extended to 22 and the same repayment rates can be maintained. The increase in mortgage interest rates is only a temporary measure. I do not know when interest rates will come down. I would be surprised if they do not start to come down within six to nine months.

The danger signal for the future of the economy is high wage demands. That is something we have to watch carefully. It has been said that our manufacturing base is depleted and all we have heard is that it is the fault of the Government and that they have not invested or done this or that. Nobody has said that it was the activities of trade unionism that priced many men out of a job. That is why our manufacturing industry went downhill.

We have a budget surplus and public expenditure is under control. I am sure that we would all like to congratulate not only my right hon. Friend the Chancellor but my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary on reducing public expenditure below 40 per cent. with the prospect of it going lower still. We take our economic pulse too frequently. Whenever an economic figure is produced we take the pulse and hear gloom and doom. One never sees the Opposition happier than when there is bad economic news. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford said, the Opposition have not mentioned unemployment because it is coming down. It is something about which one should be pleased.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor said that we were in a similar position in 1985. He took the necessary action then and has done so again now. When action is necessary —all fair-minded hon. Members will agree with this—my right hon. Friend the Chancellor takes the necessary decision whether it is difficult or unpopular. That is something for which the country should be extremely grateful. The Conservative party is certainly grateful.

The debate has been blown up out of all proportion. It is an important debate but my advice to my right hon. Friend is that we should not have any panic measures. Let us stick to the policies he has pursued over the past five or six years and I am certain that the economy will remain as prosperous as it is today.

6.15 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I do not think that the country or the House has got out of proportion the seriousness of the present economic crisis. I use the word "crisis" deliberately. I am sorry that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is leaving the Chamber because I wanted to tell him to his face that, apart from the bluster, he made an unconvincing and extraordinarily complacent speech which failed to address any of the real problems facing Britain today. He soothed his feelings by drawing upon the analogy with 1985 when there was a surge of inflation and which, by principally raising interest rates, he brought under control during the succeeding 12 months. The problem facing the Chancellor now is far greater than the problem in 1985.

In 1985 Britain was running a balance of payments surplus of the order of £7,000 million to £8,000 million. This time we are running a deficit of what looks like being £14,000 million. In the history of post-war efforts to deal with the periodic balance of payments crises, I can think of no Government that has relied upon simple interest rates to correct a profound imbalance in our current account and trading position. Believe me, we are in a state of profound imbalance at present.

For the Chancellor simply to say that there will be no change of policy and that he will be sticking to what he is doing now, which is relying simply upon what the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) described as the one—iron solution—using his golfing analogy—is unconvincing and inadequate. For him to say, as he did, that in time the current account will correct itself is to miss the whole problem that will face Britain not just now but in the future. We will be wrestling with the balance of payments problem from now until the next general election and probably beyond. It will be a number of years before we can begin to get things right after such a severe and damaging current account deficit.

One point on which the House is generally agreed is that there is clearly an excess of purchasing power in the economy. It is that which is putting an upward pressure on prices and the massive pressure, to which I have alluded, on the current trading account. With imports rising at 12 per cent. this year and exports at only 1·5 per cent. and with consumer expenditure rising by 11 per cent. this year and 9 per cent. last year there can be no doubt that excess purchasing power is sucking in imports and diverting exports away from the export to the home market.

What has produced this surge in purchasing power? Three factors have contributed. First, there has been a continuing fall in the personal savings ratio. Since 1979 it has fallen from 12·6 per cent. of personal disposable income to a mere 5·4 per cent. last year and, I believe, the figure will be even lower this year. In 1987 savings fell by no less than £4,000 million. Although I have yet to see the figures for this year, I am sure that there will be the same rate of decline.

Secondly, there has been a massive growth in indebtedness. I shall put aside house prices because they account for a large part of the personal sector indebtness. Nevertheless, since 1979, in real terms, outstanding consumer credit has risen from £16·7 billion to no less than £39·8 billion. That is an enormous and, in many ways, major new factor in the total British economy increase in debt. Since the end of 1986 to this summer, outstanding consumer credit has grown by just over £8,000 million. In addition, there were tax cuts worth £4,000 million in this year's Budget, which further increased purchasing power from June.

Thirdly, there has been an increase in income over and above the rate of inflation, although I hesitate to put a number on that latter factor as I have not seen it properly analysed. The decline in the savings ratio together with the growth of indebtedness and the tax cuts produced an increase in purchasing power of almost £16,000 million this year. In those circumstances, it is no good the Chancellor patting himself on the back for prudence in having achieved a more than balanced budget; a negative public sector borrowing requirement. The truth is that the effects of that have been more than wiped out by the massive personal sector borrowing requirement. What has been gained in public expenditure restraint has been thrown away in an orgy of private sector borrowing and expenditure. The consequences for the current account are clear and have already been discussed.

I wish to emphasise the gravity of the current position. In 1974 Britain did not have a drop of its own oil and the OPEC cartel quadrupled the price of the oil that Britain had to import. There was also a serious problem arising out of the three-day week that operated during the first quarter of the year. Apart from that year, when the British economy was reeling, Britain this year has the biggest trade deficit that it has suffered certainly for the past three decades, and possibly since before the war.

The Chancellor, who has mouthed many strictures of the United States for its large trade deficit, must now recognise that Britain's deficit, as a proportion of gross domestic product—it stands at no less than 3·5 per cent. —has actually surpassed that of the United States. The prospects for next year are not much better. The Chancellor speaks of a reduced deficit to £11,000 million, but even that is challenged by most independent economists.

The Chancellor must face the fact—even if he is not prepared to admit it in public—that there has been a gross failure of economic management and forecasting during the past year. We recall with incredulity what the Chancellor said only eight months ago when he replied to the Budget debate:

> "The policy that we have been pursuing has already brought economic success. This country is now experiencing an economic miracle, comparable in significance to that previously enjoyed by West Germany and still enjoyed by Japan."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1988; Vol. 130, c. 109.]

Such a claim is simply laughable. What the Chancellor has not begun to realise—and it is a fault that he shares with many Conservative Members—is that both Germany and Japan achieved their enormous economic success through export-led growth, accumulating balance of payments surpluses, high investment and low unemployment. Seldom has there been a greater flight from reality or a more hubristic statement than that made by the Chancellor on 21 March. Now, Nemesis has followed and the Chancellor's judgment has been devalued and deflated, not merely in this House but in the country and in the markets.

The question now is whether a similar fate awaits the British economy. How are we to put right such a massive deterioration in our economic affairs? We must increase exports and reduce imports, but to achieve that two things are necessary. First, there must be a reduction in domestic purchasing of goods and services. Secondly, we must ensure that British products are priced competitively in domestic and world markets. The Chancellor's only answer to both those requirements is to raise interest rates —which, as we well know, have already risen from 7·5 per cent. to 13 per cent. That has inflicted great pain upon house purchasers, especially first-time buyers, and there is no sign yet that there has been any significant change in the level of purchasing power. Of course, at some level of interest rates there will be a check on consumer expenditure. There will certainly be a squeezing out of the inflationary forces in the economy. No one should doubt that, if an interest rate policy is pursued ruthlessly enough, it will deal with inflation. The problem is the price that we shall then have to pay.

Those hon. Members who have already spoken properly reminded the House of the appalling damage done in 1979-80 when a massive, strongly applied interest rate policy—leading, as it did, to a massively overvalued exchange rate and a very high pound—led to the annihilation of 20 per cent. of British manufacturing capacity within two years and to a doubling in the number of unemployed to more than 3 million. Surely we should

[Mr. Peter Shore]

all be desperately anxious to avoid that. I do not refer only to the Opposition because anyone in his senses would not want to repeat the appalling experience of 1979-80.

The trouble with an interest rate policy is that it does not help us to become competitive. It will not lead to the successful transfer of resources into the export market while the pound is forcing up the price of our exports. The CBI's recent survey on British trade prospects drew attention to precisely that point. It expressed concern about the competitive pricing of British products, not simply about the lack of supply.

During the two years since June 1986—and I hate to use a jargon term, but it is the accepted measure of international competitiveness—the IMF's relative normalised unit labour cost index has shown that the price of British goods relative to those of other countries has risen by more than 16 per cent. In other words, there has been an upward valuation of 16 per cent. before this latest rescue operation on the pound and before the raising of interest rates has had time to take effect.

What the Chancellor—indeed, all of us—should be considering is how to reduce purchasing power in the United Kingdom without crippling the competitiveness of British industry. There are many ways to discourage borrowing—although I know that the Chancellor does not like them—without relying on higher interest rates. They may be imperfect, but credit controls, special deposits and other devices are available if the Chancellor has the will to use them. There is also a strong case for raising taxes. Despite the immediate adverse effect on the retail prices index, there is a great deal to be said for reconsidering the levels of VAT and Excise duties—assuming that we are still free agents in adjusting the level of such taxes and that they have not already been harmonised or frozen at their present level by agreement in the EEC.

There is a larger lesson to be learnt from this year's crisis. Is it not extraordinary—this point was made by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup—that, when more than 2 million people are unemployed in the United Kingdom, we are experiencing this massive excess of demand over supply? There is an unused resource of human beings, but we are experiencing a massive demand inflation. I believe that the chickens have come home to roost. They are not simply due to misjudgment this year and last year, but they are the failures of economic management during the entire period of Conservative Government. I hope that I am not making simply an old point, because I want people to think about this.

I have mentioned already the loss of capacity in 1979 and 1980, but the fact is that in every year since 1982 when we began, in the Chancellor's words, "to recover", investment in manufacturing industry failed to reach the levels of 1978 and 1979. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the output of Britain's manufacturing industries has been less in every year between 1980 and 1987 than it was in 1979. That was the effect of that earlier disaster and the subsequent lack of adequate investment. Until this year, we had a smaller output to meet the surge of demand than we had even in 1979. There should not be much surprise that demand has outstripped supply in British industry this year.

The final lesson that we should draw relates again to our trade deficit. It is not just the way in which it has proceeded this year, but in 1983, for the first time in our history, we had a minus balance in our trade in manufactured goods. Since then the situation has worsened year by year. In 1986 our trade deficit in manufacturing had risen to more than £5,000 million, in 1987 to more than £6,500 million and so far this year has reached £9,700 million. That is an annual rate of about £12,000 million in manufactured goods, which until 1983 we produced ourselves and were always in surplus.

This is a worrying situation. Of course, the deterioration in our trade position was masked from 1979 to 1986 by the massive output and benefit of North sea oil, which yielded some £120 billion worth of productive wealth in both import saving and exports of oil. Deterioration in our trade has now reached a point where, notwithstanding North sea oil, a massive and unprecedented deficit has been allowed to accumulate. It is anticipated that this year it will be £13,000 million to £14,000 million.

It is not, therefore, only the grievous errors of this year that need to be put right by new actions and policies, but there is a desperate need for new and realistic policies to ensure the growth of real wealth in our society and a sustained increase in investment in research and development and in education and training for our work force. To achieve that, we shall need not just a new Chancellor but, I fear, a new Government.

6.33 pm

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): It is traditional to debate economic affairs on the final day of the debate on the Loyal Address, but the tradition, too, is that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House replies and comments on matters of concern to the House.

I shall begin by raising two points to which I hope my right hon. Friend will respond. I believe that in many respects the accountability of the Government to the House has improved in the past decade. The Select Committee system, which is departmentally related, has been established, and we have introduced the Estimates Day procedure. Most recently, the Government have accepted that an agency set up under the Next Step proposals should be accountable directly to the Public Accounts Committee through its own accounting officer. However, there is a considerable danger in that the House and its Committee system have been put under pressure because of the amount of documents coming from the European Economic Community. This is putting a tremendous burden on the Scrutiny Committee, which is so admirably chaired, and carries out such important work. Therefore, I hope that we can consider—preferably through improvements in the Scrutiny Committee's work and that of the departmental Select Committees—the way in which we achieve effective accountability of the EC to the House.

Secondly, the Government have recently reorganised their affairs and split the Department of Health and Social Security. That raises the question whether there should be a corresponding division of the Select Commitees, because to a considerable extent the system of Select Committees is departmentally based. Of course, this is a matter for the House, not for the Government, but my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has an important role to play, and I should welcome his views. Because of the high percentage of expenditure and responsibility which falls on both the Department of Health and the Department of Social

Security, there is a case for a corresponding division of the Committee. Having said that, I should add that it is clear that the existing Health and Social Security Committee is already engaged in studies covering the two Departments. It would be unfortunate if that work were lost. Perhaps, too, it would wish to consider whether the Department should have been split in the way it has been. I believe that it would be appropriate to make clear at an early stage —even today—that the Committee should eventually be divided but leave the amendment of Standing Orders until a later date when the Committee has concluded its existing work.

The Treasury Select Committee is proposing to take evidence tomorrow on the economic policies contained in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. However, without pre-empting in any way the report that will be produced, it is appropriate for me to make some comments today.

It is quite extraordinary that the Opposition Front Bench spokesman made such a speech today. I believe that there is little benefit in going back over the record of the Labour Government, because it is a diminishing asset in political terms. Many of my constituents who now vote are not old enough to remember anything about it. It is extraordinary that, far from adopting a policy of happy is the party that has no history, the Labour party appears to be in the position of happy is the party that has no policy. The policies proposed by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) of special deposits and credit controls belong to a bygone age. The system now is far too open—in 1992 it will become even more so —for it to be considered that credit controls or special deposits would be an effective way of dealing with our problems.

I supported the Chancellor in putting up interest rates last week. It was the right thing to do. I am rather more doubtful about his presentation of that matter, because he is inclined to say, "Short-term interest rates are the only weapon which has been available." It has been suggested that this is a sort of one-club golfer approach to the problem. I am worried about analogies to golf, because in the first match that I played in my constituency I received a prize for the highest score at any one hole. Be that as it may, it is much easier to play golf with just one club if one can determine the shape of the course. My right hon. Friend is not dealing only with interest rates, because they must be considered within the framework of fiscal policy. He is wrong to underestimate the importance of that policy and that has led to some confusion.

Although the Opposition complain about the size of the tax cuts in the last Budget, the combination of the present level of taxation and public expenditure means that we are now running a massive budget surplus. That is also bearing down on inflation and it is important to economic management. We are not faced with the problem of too much public borrowing—a problem that has beset us for many years—because the Government are now making massive debt repayments. The problem, as pointed out by many hon. Members, is that there is too much private borrowing to pay for consumption. In that context, the increase in the rate of interest will undoubtedly have an effect. It may not deter the person who intends to buy a washing machine with a credit card because, in many cases, those interest charges are already extortionate, but it will affect those who are borrowing on mortgages and therefore it will affect their ability to consume.

I believe that the measures that the Chancellor has taken will affect the general level of demand and bring us back on course. The problems of forecasting make it difficult to predict the rate of economic growth and I am sure that all hon. Members would accept that. Therefore, our present economic position is not as envisaged.

We face problems with the savings ratio. People are not only borrowing too much, but they are saving too little. I know that my right hon. Friend will be making a review of the economy ahead of the next Budget and I hope that he will consider incentives for saving. They deserve review. In that context, I have considerable doubts about whether he is right to press ahead at this time with some of his proposals to change the taxation position of life insurance companies. Life insurance policies are an important feature of our savings structure and it would not be appropriate to alter their tax position now.

It is important to stress that the present pattern of interest rates is not what it used to be. The Chancellor is using short-term interest rates to determine the way in which the economy operates. None the less, the longer-term interest rates are significantly lower and the yield curve is unusual. For industries the longer-term interest rates are more important than the short-term interest rates.

My right hon. Friend was right to take action last week on the interest rate, given the balance of payments figures. If he had not taken such action it is likely that the exchange rate would have declined. That would have meant that the substantial exports that are already in the pipeline would have produced less. In the short term, that would not be a favourable state of affairs. Therefore, the tactical decision taken by my right hon. Friend was appropriate. We do not know how long my right hon. Friend will need to sustain interest rates at their new level, but in the context of last week's announcement, my right hon. Friend's action was correct.

For the long-term future of industry a crucial aspect is not simply interest rates, but wage settlements. Such settlements give cause for concern and of particular concern is the fact that the retail prices index includes mortgage payments. I was surprised when my right hon. Friend referred to that. If one wants to understand the danger in specific terms, one should consider what happened with the Ford pay settlement the other day. That settlement is a certain number of percentage points above the RPI and the RPI happened to jump at the time that that settlement was negotiated. It did not jump because of the underlying rate of inflation, but because of the increase in mortgage interest rates. Of course we shall not see a corresponding reduction in the pay of Ford workers if the mortgage interest rate comes down. Therefore, the inclusion of mortgage interest rates in the RPI causes a ratchet effect. As mortgage interest rates go down as well as up in the normal course of events, we must consider whether it is appropriate to include them in the RPI. For that reason I was interested in the comments that my right hon. Friend made.

Mr. Harry Ewing *rose*——

Mr. Higgins: I shall not give way as I always get worried when Privy Councillors go on too long. In any event, I am about to conclude.

The overall position that the Chancellor has adopted on interest rate policy is correct. The current fiscal

[Mr. Higgins]

framework, which shows that we have a massive surplus compared with previous periods, is the appropriate one for the present time.

It is odd that the Opposition appear to be arguing that we should have an even bigger surplus because there were too many tax cuts in the Budget. As the late Iain Macleod always said, Labour Governments put up taxes and Conservative Governments reduce taxes. That is the correct strategic approach. Obviously we shall need to review taxation in the context of the next Budget and I look forward to my right hon. Friend presenting it.

6.45 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): The right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, of which I am a member, talked about accountability. The way in which it works is like this: he drafts the report and then uses his Conservative majority—some of them are here—to get it through. If the next report expresses what the right hon. Gentleman has said this year, we shall have a report of such sycophancy that some of us shall be asking Alice to pass the sick bag.

When I heard the Chancellor today all bubbly and bright, when I thought that he would have a hangover, I was reminded of the aphorism of Alexander Pope in his epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot:

"Take it for a rule
No creature smarts so little as a fool".

I note that the Chancellor has just left the Chamber.

When the Chancellor goes to meet his maker—perhaps if the Prime Minister has any say in this matter it will not be too long hence—I believe that his row will not be with the modern poets so much as with the philosophers of antiquity. Frankly, I doubt whether Aristotle, the logician and the great creator of the syllogism, will ever forgive the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what he has done this year.

When the Chancellor of the Exchequer first came to office he gave us a breathless syllogism. It was irredeemably strong, irreducibly simple and ineradicably true. He said, "All countries of low inflation are competitive. All countries which are competitive do not have a balance of payments problem. Britain has low inflation and does not have balance of payments problems." Here was a syllogism that scintillated. He united Aristotle with the classical economists, the Keynesians, the neo-monetarists and even the new Tories from *Marxism Today*. But—there is always a but when con artists are concerned—somewhere along the line someone forgot to tell the Chancellor that for a conclusion to be not only deducible from its premises, but correct in its application to the world which it purports to describe, its premises must be capable of empirical verification. Deduction and induction must at some stage during the argument synthesise.

The Lawson fallacy has been to move from false premises to false conclusions by suspect processes of logic. I believe that the purpose of this debate is to teach the Chancellor not only a few lessons in elementary economic theory in practice, but a few lessons in elementary logical analysis.

I begin with a succinct premise born of dispassionate analysis with which I believe every hon. Member would agree given the events of the past year. It is a simple one: "The Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), is an economic illiterate". Does it really matter if that is so?

I do not wish to place too much faith in economists. I am rather inclined to the view that Sir Kenneth Berrill, the former chief economist to the Treasury, gave me over a pint of beer at Sunningdale one day. He said that the difference between a scientist and an economist is that scientists sometimes get it right. Nevertheless, I believe that the Chancellor's ignorance in economic affairs is gross, excessive and offensive.

I shall deal first with economic forecasting. When I was 16, my economics tutor at school said to me "Sedgemore, in the hands of a professional, economic forecasting is a dangerous business. In the hands of an ambitious politician, it gives rise to self-delusion, followed by deceit, ending up in catastrophe." The Lawson catastrophe is surely living proof of what a wise old owl my tutor was.

Let us first consider the Chancellor's forecast for the balance of payments deficit. Assuming that the outturn will be £16 billion—my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) is always too kind, and I think that it will be more than he said—that is not 100 per cent., 200 per cent. or 300 per cent. wrong; it is 400 per cent. wrong.

Let us suppose that the chief economist to the National Westminster bank goes to his chairman, Lord Boardman, at the other end of the corridor and says, "Mr. Chairman, your Lordship, I've got my economic forecast for the year, and here it is, but I must tell you that the margin of error is plus or minus 400 per cent." Let no one tell me that that chief economist would keep his job. What worries me, as I look at the Government Benches, is that not a single Conservative Back Bencher—except perhaps the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath)—feels any guilt, shame or worry that there is a 400 per cent. margin of error in the forecast which has serious repercussions for the economy.

The matter is worse than that. When the Chancellor came to office, he forecast zero inflation in some years' time. I do not know how many mathematicians there are in the House. If there are any, they will know that the difference between zero inflation and the current rate of inflation is not 100 per cent., or 1 million per cent., or 1 billion per cent.; it is an infinite per cent. What can one say of a Chancellor who, on proven mathematical formulae, gets it infinitely wrong?

Let us consider the cure for inflation. Many cures for rising prices have been put forward by economists through the ages. As far as I am aware, the Chancellor is the first person in human history to say that the only cure for rising prices is to push prices even higher. That must be the own goal of the century. Let us imagine that England are playing West Germany at football and that Bobby Robson —one of the greatest failures of our time, as the Chancellor will be proved to be by history—comes into the dressing room and says, "Lads, this West German side is damned good, but when the players become over-confident they become vulnerable. Here's the game plan. If they don't score in the first 10 minutes, we'll put the ball into the back of our own net. Then they'll become over-confident and vulnerable."

I do not want to be unfair to the Chancellor because he has an answer to my criticism. I shall paraphrase his answer, but it is an honest paraphrase. He says, "When I push up prices by pushing up the cost of borrowing and when I push up mortgage rates so that Sedgemore, who paid £464 in November 1987, now pays £505 and in January of next year will pay even more, I am actually lowering prices and only the mad, the bad, the sad and prats like Sedgemore believe that I am doing otherwise." When the Chancellor says that when he gives us poison in the short term he is really giving us medicine in the long term, he reminds us of Father William in "Alice in Wonderland"—I am sure that all hon. Members have read that book, although they are not all mathematicians:

"'You are old, Father William', the young man said,
'And your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head—
Do you think, at your age, it is right?'
'In my youth; Father William replied to his son,
'I feared it might injure the brain;
But now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,
'Why, I do it again and again.'"

It must be because the Chancellor's brain has gone missing—"Spitting Image" has got it wrong—that interest rates have been put up again and again.

I shall again paraphrase what the Chancellor said on television last week about the relationship between wage pressures and inflation. He said, "I shall reduce wage pressures by increasing them through higher mortgage rates and higher inflation." I used to think, being a gentle man, that despite the fact that I sometimes came to verbal blows with the Chancellor, he was a lovable, Rabelaisian roué. But the more I think about it now, the more I believe that he is a devious and sinister Schiller-like figure and, like the gods, I begin to despair. As Schiller wrote,

"Mit der Dummheit kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens."

That is, against stupidity, even the gods struggle in vain.

When one considers the balance of payments, which has been a major issue today, the gobbledegook not only from the Chancellor, but from his chief economic adviser, Sir Terence Burns, becomes even worse. Sir Terence gave evidence to the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service last week. I shall paraphrase what he said to me. "When the statisticians correct the figures, things may not be as bad as they seem." That is economics on a wing and a prayer. Last week, the Chancellor said—I shall again paraphrase—"The balance of payments deficit is a sign of the success of our policies. All I need to do is to make a few adjustments." That is economics by hunch, by guess and by god. I prefer it by somebody else.

Last week, the Chancellor said on radio—I am paraphrasing—"I'm so happy with things as they are that I'd willingly give up my job and make money in the City." That is more honest and that is the economics of blue funk. The Chancellor is the first economist in history to insist that the only cure for the balance of payments is to raise interest rates.

At the Treasury—there are a few Treasury officials sitting in the Box—there used to be textbooks on the walls. I am sure that the textbooks did not say that the only way to deal with a balance of payments crisis was to raise interest rates. In the textbooks that I read, the authors used to give many options. They said, for example, that there could be currency depreciation, devaluation, import control by administrative means, price or quota, or deflation. In an arrogant fit of pique, the Chancellor has burnt all those books, so he need not admit that he has made a mistake. Those books are no longer on the library shelves. When I asked Sir Terence Burns about the textbooks, he did not know anything about them and said that they were no longer relevant.

On the subject of the consumer boom, the Chancellor is the only economist in history to say that the only way to cure it is to raise interest rates. The textbooks would tell another story, if they existed, and would suggest a whole battery of fiscal policies that could be used. They would say that monetary conditions can be altered by credit control, with or without exchange controls. They would say, even more importantly, that the propensity to imports can be changed either by switching from consumption to investment or by switching from consumption to public expenditure. That meets one of the sillier points made by the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark).

Having abandoned the sum total of human knowledge as set out by economists around the world throughout history, the Chancellor is surprised that he now begins to get everything wrong, that he is the laughing stock of G7 Ministers, that the people from the International Monetary Fund who have just come to this country are beginning to find him an object of scorn and that he is the butt of cartoonists in our national newspapers.

The underlying reason for all that is simple. The Chancellor is driven by one linked belief—a belief in markets, deregulation and the idea that monetary control is the only control of the economy. He has tried it nine times and has failed. He tried M3, and when that failed he tried MO; when that failed he tried M1 and when that failed he tried M2; when that failed he tried M4 and when that failed he tried M5; when that failed he tried PSL1 and when that failed he tried PSL2—and when that failed he tried DCE.

We are coming up to Christmas and I am prepared to offer £10 to a charity chosen by any Conservative Back Bencher who can now interrupt me and give me a definition of each and every one of the Chancellor's monetary variables. Is it not extraordinary that not one Conservative Back Bencher knows what the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been talking about for the past five years? They go back to their constituencies every week and preach monetarist dogma, but they cannot define the basic definitions.

Then, as if all that is not enough——

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay) *rose*——

Mr. Sedgemore: I think I shall sit down.

Mrs. Gorman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that his party's addiction to Keynesian economics is just as indecipherable, inscrutable and completely unintelligible to the man in the street?

Mr. Sedgemore: As I am never quite sure what my party is addicted to these days, the hon. Lady must forgive me if I do not respond. I like Keynes and think that he was a great person. Indeed, I believe that we want a combination of Keynes and Marx, and that is what I am working on. If the hon. Lady has a little faith, the right policies will come along.

The last curse of the Chancellor is that he is now coming here with the ultimate lunacy. He told us this afternoon that he can control each and every one of these economic variables all the time and at the same time, and that, although there is not a shred of empirical evidence that

[Mr. Sedgemore]

there is any relationship between one or all of the variables and the rate of inflation or the balance of payments, that will effect a magical economic cure. What is wrong with that is quite simple: it is economics by formulae, whereas we want economics by judgment. It is because the Chancellor of the Exchequer is wholly lacking in economic judgment that we shall oppose the Government tonight.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I should remind the House that we are now in the period of the 10-minute limit for speeches.

7.2 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) told us that he very much admired his economics tutor, but he did not tell us what his economics teacher thought of him. I can only guess from his fluent command of German that his economics tutor shunted him off as soon as he possibly could.

Last October, most of us were concerned about the effect of the crash and what it might do to the world economy. Although there were signs of monetary overheating, the judgment of the House—this was certainly true of the Opposition at the time—was in favour of keeping the economy going, and that was the view of other countries also. I know that by the Budget earlier this year it was clear that the world economy had recovered and that all might be well, but there was nevertheless some doubt about that.

Therefore, it was perfectly proper for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to remind us earlier today that on balance he thought that reducing the rate of interest to 7·5 per cent. was the right thing to do. If he had reduced the rate of interest to 7·5 per cent. and combined that with an announcement that we were to join the European monetary system and have a close association with the deutschmark, that would have had a salutary effect on inflation prospects. Unfortunately, that was not done.

In retrospect, it is easy to see that reducing the rate of interest at the time of the Budget without an accompanying commitment to the deutschmark or to joining the EMS was a mistake. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has cheerfully admitted that.

Looking at this crisis—as the Opposition call it—and comparing it with others—many right hon. and hon. Members present can remember former crises—the question that arises is how serious a crisis is it. The one thing that distinguishes former crises from the present situation is that in each and every one of those crises there was a large public sector deficit and a significant public sector borrowing requirement.

Those deficits drew the attention of the International Monetary Fund and created real problems for the Governments of the time. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) reminded me of that, but did not say that the distinction between the current position and that in 1973-74 is that out of our total revenue in 1973 of £24 billion, our PSBR was £2·2 billion —nearly 10 per cent. In 1974, the PSBR was £3·5 billion out of a total revenue of £29 billion—well over 10 per cent. If that did not set the alarm bells ringing, I do not know what should have set them ringing. It certainly alarmed me and some of my hon. Friends.

If one contrasts the position of the early 1970s with the later 1970s when we saw the large PSBR difficulties and the deficit of the Labour Government with our position today, one must admit that there has been a most remarkable transformation. I did not think that we would see the day when we would be repaying our public sector debt at the level that we are. I believe that it is £10 billion this year —and not all of that is money drawn from the sale of nationalised assets. Even if we do not take those into consideration, I believe that we are repaying about £4 billion.

It is not possible to minimise the importance of the public sector surplus and the way in which it is being treated. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is perfectly justified in taking credit for that. If that large sector of the economy—the public sector—is in surplus, where do we look for the trouble spots in other parts of the economy? Companies are a very important part of our economy and it is clear that we are in substantial surplus in that area also. In 1983, company savings amounted to £25·9 billion, less capital investment of £15·8 billion. Last year, company savings were nearly £46 billion—by far the largest ever —and our capital investment was £30·7 billion—again by far the largest ever. In the second quarter of this year, both savings and capital investments in the company sector have been higher. Therefore, we are in an extremely strong position in both the public sector and the corporate sector. Indeed, I do not believe that the corporate sector has ever been as healthy as it is today.

One can draw a sharp distinction between today's position and what used to happen in the 1970s. That distinction is important and significant. However, we have a particular problem with the personal sector and I do not think that it is right to minimise that. In 1983, personal sector savings were £21·3 billion, but last year they had fallen to £14·8 billion. However, the figures for borrowing for house purchases were £14·5 billion in 1983 and they have risen to £29·6 billion. Therefore, not only had savings in the private sector reduced significantly, but borrowing for house purchase and other activities had increased markedly. In fact, borrowing for house purchase was twice the level of private sector saving. The Government must take account of that fact.

We need to address the matter of borrowing for consumption. In 1987, such borrowing totalled £8·7 billion and in the first three quarters of this year it was £9·3 billion. That shows an extraordinary increase which far exceeds the rate of saving. Therefore, if we have to distinguish the parts of the economy that are doing pretty well and are comfortably well off, they would be the public and corporate sectors.

When Opposition Members talk about the damage caused by higher interest rates, they should bear in mind the level of corporate sector savings. I do not think that they have ever been quite so healthy. It is quite clear that corporations are increasingly financing themselves not through borrowing but through retaining cash. Contrary to what Opposition Members say, the corporate sector will not find much of a squeeze for the moment. Smaller companies and individuals may do so, but, in the sector as a whole, companies will not find all that much difficulty.

What is to be done in the private sector? My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and other hon. Members touched on this matter. We need a two-pronged attack to increase the level of private sector savings and to diminish private sector expenditure. If we can improve the rate of savings by a significant amount, the consumer boom will diminish, and if we can discourage people from spending as much as they do at present we shall enlarge the effect.

Let us examine the prospects. With interest rates as high as they are now, they must be an attractive proposition for private savers. We should not forget that there are rather more private sector savers than borrowers, and I expect them to increase thir savings. The private sector is quite well off at the moment, with wage increases going on as fast as they are. That is another point that we must have in mind. It is right to use interest rates to discourage expenditure.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) thought that the Chancellor was using only one golf club. I inform my right hon. Friend, who used all kinds of devices, including prices and incomes policies and other things that did not work, that it is much better to go around a golf course with one club—I speak with my enormous handicap as the parliamentary golf champion—than it is to go around with a sand bag and axe in one's golf bag, which is what my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup did.

I conclude my remarks. I had no idea that I had taken so long, and I apologise for doing so. I have made the important points that I wished to make.

7.12 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I start by referring to a couple of points that affect my constituency and Scotland, and use them to instance where things are going wrong in the economy. One matter about which people have not talked much, but which I find disturbing, is the of takeover mania that has been going on. I refer to a quite small takeover, whereby the French firm Kelt has been trying to take over the British oil firm Carless. In Old Kilpatrick, in my constituency, there is a small oil refinery that Kelt has never heard of. One of those high leverage bids is in progress. A bid of £206 million has been put in, and, to finance it, Kelt must borrow £191 million, which must be paid back in total within 12 months. It is quite staggering. There is only one way in which that can be done, and that is by selling the assets of the company that is being bought. It means that, in a sense, Kelt has quite honestly declared that it has no interest in downstream activities—oil refineries, oil products and so on. It is interested only in drilling rights. My constituents, along with those of many other hon. Members, have found that a firm is being sold off.

What are the prospects for that firm? Carless behaved in an exemplary way. It had taken over an oil refinery that was going nowhere. It invested heavily in it, and saw that there could be a long-term market—already employing 100 people in my constituency—in producing specialist oils, napthenic oils, and transformer oils, for which it had a market lead. It is clear that if the bid goes through the company will be sold, either at a cheap rate—in which case, it will eventually close—or to a foreign competitor.

What is the relevance of that kind of takeover to the future prosperity of the country? Who benefits from that kind of takeover? The Chancellor is turning a blind eye. That is one illustration of how the economy is working.

Another illustration has an insidious effect on the social fabric of the country. We heard the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and other hon. Members refer to wage rises and how they are pushing up inflation. I refer to the behaviour of the directors of Scottish and Newcastle Breweries. As it happens, the great mass of Scottish Members support Scottish and Newcastle in its resistance to Elders bid. But what have the directors of Scottish and Newcastle done to command support?

A group of people were already in a position to set their own salaries and to say what they were worth. How lovely it must be for one to say how much one is worth and how much one can be paid. Then along came the Chancellor who said, "You are not worth as much as you once said you were; you are worth more." Then along came Elders. This year we have been inundated with rumours about the takeover of Scottish and Newcastle by Elders or others. The directors of Scottish and Newcastle were issued with privileged shares. What did they do? They sold them at a profit of £560,000, individually making £80,000 profit.

On 17 December, the chief executive of Scottish and Newcastle, Mr. Rankin, exercised his right to buy 100,000 shares at 110p. He sold them the same day for 214p, netting £104,000 profit. On 22 March, the managing director exercised an option over 80,000 Scottish and Newcastle shares at 110p, and sold them the same day at 280p a share—a profit of £136,000 on one day.

In that sort of climate, in which the force of Thatcherism has been set loose, it ill-behoves Conservative Members to talk about holding back wage demands.

Let us examine another way in which the events of that crisis are bothering my constituency and many other Scottish constituencies. It means that, perhaps, we are heading not only for a slow down in the economy but for a full stop as the forces of higher interest rates operate. There will be considerable difficulty for areas that have not yet benefited from any northward spread or ripple in the economy. I am particularly keen to change the Government's belief that urban regeneration in the north and in Scotland and Wales can be private sector-led.

The chairman of the Scottish CBI, Mr. William Hughes, pointed out that Glasgow was the best example of what public and private partnership could achieve. He acknowledged that the Scottish Development Agency, Strathclyde region and Glasgow district had been the prime movers in starting Glasgow's remarkable investment programme. He stated:

"Business contributed its energy, enterprise and capability. It is not necessary that we bring cash to the partnership."

It is essential that someone brings cash to the partnership, that we stop the abuse of local government which Mr. Hughes recognised was causing the turnround in Glasgow, and that this regeneration is not stopped because the south-east starts to overheat. We shall look for a change of policy by the Government in that respect.

We have heard about economic miracles, but what economic miracle do we have? No other advanced country has neglected manufacturing industry as we have, and we claim an economic miracle when the British public cannot or will not buy British goods. We have heard about increases in productivity but, as John Banham said, our productivity is still 10 years behind French and West German levels and 20 years behind the Japanese level. Our productivity has increased but from a low level.

We hear about 1992 which holds considerable dangers as well as opportunities. Banham says that German social

[Mr. Tony Worthington]

costs and legislation, together with United Kingdom productivity, would be a lethal combination. Is it any wonder that the Chancellor is worried about 1992?

7.22 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I think that my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) were a bit rough with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) in saying that he did not produce any policy. The fellow was doing his best and he produced a policy in the middle of his speech as the answer to our immediate problems. It was one that he had inherited from previous Labour Governments: to increase taxes and reverse tax cuts. We have heard that before.

The Labour party has been through a good many rethinks recently, some of which are rather heartening. For example, I like the way that it is beginning to take Europe seriously, even if it is attracted by some aspects which do not attract me. But it has not yet grasped the central point about taxation policy, which my party and the Government have grasped, and that is that if one reduces the rates, one raises the yield. The Labour party should grasp that point by studying the facts of recent developments here, in the United States, West Germany, France and Japan. Again and again low-tax societies are seeing an acceleration in revenue, and until the Labour party grasps that, it will be in a constant muddle.

Mr. Dobson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howell: I cannot because we are in the sprint section of the debate and we have to scramble on. I do not like it, but that is how the debate is organised.

We face ferociously unstable world conditions. Ours is a medium-sized economy in a big sea and the high ambitions of any economic task today must be to keep the boat afloat rather than to be precise about where we can land it.

There runs through these debates nowadays a grossly exaggerated view of what national economic managers can achieve either by manipulating Keynesian or monetary aggregates. The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) treated us to an endearing and entertaining speech which we enjoyed but which was riddled with that concept which Marx to some extent entertained. Equally, Keynes saw, because that was the world in which he lived, that each economy was an autonomous unit which could be managed and turned up and down by pressing the appropriate monetary or Keynesian levers. That age has completely disappeared.

We are now in an enormous and uncertain global environment in which appalling crises come along, forecasting is virtually impossible and statistics are wildly wrong. I believe that the Central Statistical Office is still revising the figures of 10 years ago and finding them wrong. We face great uncertainties, not least across the Atlantic with the new President shaping up to his huge budget deficit, the continuing imbalances of both Japan and the United States, the looming crisis over leverage buy-outs—another big crisis involving billions of the American thrift institutions which have all been taken for a ride—and plenty more crises beyond that, all occasionally erupting into financial instability.

The Chancellor had to make his judgment a year ago in the context of black Monday and everyone, but everyone, was saying that we must avoid a repeat of 1929. There was universal acclaim for the skill with which he and other G7 Ministers organised finances to prevent economic slump following financial slump. It is no good today saying that we have forgotten all that and we shall judge him on different criteria. A year ago everyone—not least the Labour party and many of my hon. Friends—was full of wisdom that that was the line that he had to take. Now the pattern has changed and expansion has been far more vigorous than anyone predicted. We face overheating which has given rise partly to the trade deficit and to the theme of this debate.

Interest rates of 13 per cent. are probably the top and high enough to satisfy the international holders of sterling and to cool the economy. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) is a great expert on these matters, I do not think that that rate provides much of a savings incentive. An individual would receive 8·5 or 9 per cent. interest from a building society or high interest bank account, but when one knocks off 25 or 40 per cent. income tax it hardly leaves a real return, so that will not help the drive for savings.

What then do we do? All hon. Members have rightly said that this is not 1974 or 1981 but an entirely new situation both globally and locally. It is new because we have some of the strongest public-sector finances in the world with a colossal surplus. The public sector is saving and is not in debt and the corporate sector is saving massively and is not in debt. Some experts say that that is an inevitable reflection of the fact that the private sector and consumers are not saving.

The corporate sector is sitting on billions of retained profits. Mr. Tim Congdon, in an interesting article in *The Times*, pointed out that perhaps all our views of the low personal savings ratio here and in the United States are badly wrong. Bearing in mind his warning that the situation may not be as bad as we think, the next move in the evolution of Government strategy, having so far rightly put all the emphasis on interest rates, should be to give some indication of thinking about how to raise personal savings. In short—and my Conservative colleagues should be particularly enthused with this thought—we should consider how to get savings out of the state sector and into private hands without it leading to more consumption.

There are ways of doing that and they should be discussed in preparation for policy makers to develop them in time for the Budget. In particular, we should think of ways of encouraging savings in shares, unit trusts and various assets, as they have gone into housing. I should like to see a levelling up rather than a levelling down of tax reliefs. As others have suggested, I should like to see limited front-end tax relief for savings for millions of people similar to the system introduced in France in the early 1980s, which was called the loi monory.

We should encourage a much greater expansion of personal pension schemes—the self-employed pension schemes that involve putting money aside to add to one's own pension. The trouble is that the fiscal structure is geared away from encouraging personal savings and towards institutional savings. Again, there should be a levelling up rather than a levelling down. Unless we change that pattern, far from wider share ownership there will be narrower share ownership. That is happening already, with 80 per cent. of equity being held by institutions. That is much higher than even five years ago, and the pace in that direction is increasing. If my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench wish to maintain steam in the direction towards wider personal share ownership, they will have to have some new thoughts about personal savings incentives to make them at least as good as the incentives to save through institutions. The latter increasingly dominate our economy—much more so than many other economies.

I have talked about savings for people who pay tax, but we must not forget that many millions of people do not pay tax. The social security system is geared to discourage them from saving and to push them into a poverty and savings trap. That is highly undesirable and should worry the Conservative party more than it does. If we wish to extend the philosophy of more personal savings and wider share ownership to all levels of society, we must reform the tax system and the social security benefits system together, which at present are too discouraging to those who save a little. Their savings deny them a range of benefits.

That poverty trap is much too deep in our society, and it is made deeper by too much targeting. I am all for targeting the elderly, but if we target too much those of working age we shall create an even bigger poverty trap and greater discouragement for millions of people to save money and join in the ownership economy that we wish to create.

7.32 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): In the Gracious Speech the Government said that they would bear down on inflation and foster conditions for sustained growth. But we are in the midst of a crisis of inflation. Barely a week ago, we were told that everything was fine and that we need only keep our current policies on course to reach a point where inflation would be much lower than it is now. We were told that unemployment would continue to fall and that, perhaps before the next election, it might be as low as it was when the Labour Government were in power. But the balance of payments deficit and the 1 per cent. increase in interest rates, which is likely to lead to an increase in the mortgage rate of 0·5 or 0·75 per cent. next year, following more than half a dozen increases since May, mean that we are in the middle of a crisis. But the Government pooh pooh that notion and try to push it to one side.

Suddenly it has become wrong to include mortgage interest increases in the cost of living index. Tell that to home owners who must dig deeper into their pockets to pay increased mortgage charges. Of course, the mortgage rate is part of their cost of living. Any attempt to take it out of the retail prices index would echo the tricks used by the Government to reduce the real rate of unemployment. They are merely shuffling the figures. Let us not push aside the increase in mortgage rates as being of no importance. What price does the Chancellor put on the property-owning democracy that he is so keen to encourage?

The Chancellor's policies are in shreds. He cannot admit it, but almost every forecast that he made in the Autumn Statement has already gone hopelessly wrong. He says that he has never laid importance on forecasting, but as Chancellor of the Exchequer he must develop policies based on forecasts of what he believes may happen. At one time, the Chancellor hoped that inflation would be zero, and later he thought that it might be about 4 to 5 per cent. It is now nearly 6·5 per cent. and is likely to go much higher during the year. Unemployment, which was showing a downward trend, is likely to increase again. Perhaps when the Leader of the House replies to the debate he will forecast what will happen to unemployment. Dare we ask for a forecast of the trade deficit? Will the Government give us any idea of what they believe will happen? If the policy of increasing interest rates is the only one that the Government have, what effect will it have on the British economy? What effect will it have on inflation and on unemployment during the next three months, six months or the coming year?

It is especially important for the regions of the United Kingdom to know what those forecasts are. Most jobs have been created in the south-east. Outside the south-east, there are far fewer jobs than there were in 1979. Despite an expansion in part-time jobs, in Wales there are 130,000 fewer jobs than there were in 1979. In Scotland, the comparable figure is 173,000. In almost every standard planning region in England, above the line drawn from the Severn to the Wash, there are fewer jobs than there were in 1979. Will the Chancellor's policy of a 1 per cent. increase in interest rates now, perhaps with later increases, do anything to create jobs, especially north of that line from the Severn to the Wash? I want to hear answers to those questions tonight.

What will the increase in interest rates do to Government revenue? Although it may be the most fiendishly difficult area in which to make forecasts, it is thought that if domestic demand is reduced—that is what the Government hope will happen—by about 2 or 2·5 per cent., it could reduce Government revenue by almost £2 billion. We have many questions to ask the Government about how their current policy will affect the economy, especially the economy of the regions.

The Government's regional policy has resulted in real-terms spending on the regions being cut by two thirds since they came to power. What are the alternative policies? Virtually everybody outside the Tory party and its running dog economists forecast that the cuts in tax rates would lead to a consumer boom and to pressure on the balance of payments. An even more conservative body than the Tory party is the House of Lords, and its Select Committee on Trade and Industry said in 1985 that under the Government's current policies there was bound to be a problem in sustaining exports and controlling imports.

The chickens are coming home to roost and there is no point in the Government saying that their interest rate policy is the only one that they have. There is no point in Conservative Members and the Chancellor saying that the mortgage interest rate should be taken out of the retail price index because it does not really count and that things will be better if it is removed. The high mortgage interest rate means that it is costing people more to live in Britain and it is resulting in higher unemployment outside the south-east. Because of dramatically overheating pressures in the south-east, people from Wales, Scotland and the north cannot afford to go south to take up jobs.

Some of my constituents have written to me asking if I can find them a home that they can afford in London. They say that they have jobs here, but cannot bring their families to live in London. That will remain a constant problem for the Government. I hope that the Chancellor will have some humility and will realise that what he has done so far is wrong. I hope that he will adjust his course

[Mr. Win Griffiths]

so that we can get more public investment because that will create more jobs and will not lead to a vast increase in imports. I hope that the Chancellor is listening.

7.42 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I should like to speak about competition policy and ought therefore to declare an interest, albeit a rather indirect one. For some years I was a director of Morgan Grenfell, the merchant bankers. I resigned from the board a few months after being elected to the House last year, but I am still a consultant to my former firm. I am also a director of Dewe Rogerson International which has advised many major companies on the communication aspects of bids and mergers. I emphasise that neither of those companies had the faintest idea that I would seek to speak in the debate and neither knows what I am about to say, except in so far as my former colleagues may know my general ideas on the subject.

I congratulate the Government on what appears to have been a robust response to the nervous bleatings that we heard the other day from some members of the Confederation of British Industry who appear to be afraid of being taken over. The existence of a public market in mergers and acquisitions is an important element in the motivation of top management. I can think of few better ways of blunting the cutting edge of management aggressiveness than sending out a clear signal to top managers that they are secure in their jobs indefinitely and can sit back comfortably until the end of their careers.

Mergers and acquisitions are also an important element in the essential process of readaption and renovation of industry. Traditionally we used to think of mergers and acquisitions as leading to the concentration of industry. Of course that is the Marxist tradition in which some Opposition Members were brought up. We now see increasingly—and the examples in the United States are particularly encouraging—that mergers and acquisitions can just as readily be about the disaggregation as about the concentration of industry. Sometimes they are the only effective way of breaking up conglomerates that have lost their rationale or perhaps never had a great rationale. They can release the component businesses to develop their own focus without the encumbrance of the constraints and the avoidable overheads from which they previously suffered.

Where mergers or acquisitions involve management buy-outs, whether because management instigates the bid or because a successful bid clears the way for a management buy-out, a most interesting and encouraging phenomenon occurs. The businesses concerned are returned to the entrepreneurial model of business leadership that was the basis of our industrial revolution and the model within which most firms have known their fastest periods of growth.

Mergers and acquisitions are thus an important and useful engine of economic progress and it is important that competition policy should not act as an undue brake on that engine.

Against that background I should like to draw the attention of the House to a major qualitative change in this area which we are now forced to recognise. It is the international dimension to competition policy. Global markets—financial, industrial and commercial—appear to be here to stay and I thank God for it. We no longer therefore have the luxury of conducting a pure competition policy within national boundaries.

I draw to the attention of the House two aspects of this internationalisation. One is the impact of the choice of a geographical perimeter or horizon for competition policy on industrial structure. I shall quote one brief example. At the time of the Nestlé bid for Rowntree it was widely theorised that an alternative might have been a merger between Cadbury Schweppes and Rowntree. I have no idea how seriously that possibility was examined by those firms. However, it had been considered axiomatic in the City for a long time that such a merger would have been excluded by competition policy because in Britain those two firms combined would have had a dominant market share, or would have been considered to have such a share.

In the international context or in the context of the European Community, however, a merger between Cadbury Schweppes and Rowntree would have had less of an impact on competition than the merger between Nestlé and Rowntree which took place. I pass no judgment on the merits of that merger, but draw to the attention of Ministers whose responsibilities lie in this direction that competition policy, as it is presently structured, effectively excluded the option of the emergence in Britain of a major international confectionery grouping, a British Nestlé or a British Jacobs Suchard. I regret that, and in that context I am delighted to see that the Government are taking part in discussions with our Community partners with a view to producing a regime under which major mergers with sales of more than 1 billion ecus and considerable transnational business will in future be examined on a Communitywide basis. I am convinced that that is in the interests of British industry.

Another aspect of this international dimension is the whole issue of reciprocity. At the time of the Nestlé bid, general attention was focused on the fact that many Swiss and Scandinavian companies have articles of association or foreign exchange regulations that prevent foreigners from buying certain classes of their shares. It is much less well known that even within the European Community many public companies, and the majority of such companies in Holland and Germany, have provisions that prevent any shareholder holding more than 3 or 5 per cent. of their stock. Effectively that means that those companies are proof against takeovers. That presents a dangerous and unfair constraint on British industry. It means that the acquisition and merger flows can go in only one direction. It also means that if major international industrial groupings are to be formed by means of acquisition in the European Community, they will be based on the continent and not here.

I ask for no privileges for British industry but only that it should not be asked to play on a field where the other side plays in front of a closed goal. I beg Ministers who have these responsibilities to consider with some urgency, whether in the context of a new European company law or otherwise, how we can get back to having Queensberry rules in this area. That would be in the interests of the whole of the European Community.

7.50 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): The silence which greeted the Chancellor's speech from those on the Benches behind him was eloquent testimony of the scale of the difficulties that he now faces. This is a cruel place, and those who cheered his tax cuts to the roof last April were noticeably silent as he dug the pit deeper today. Perhaps they got a glimpse of the future, and did not like what they saw.

I shall forgo the temptation to sympathise with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He is in the process of getting his come-uppance. It is long overdue and it could not have happened to a nicer fellow. However, no one should suffer from the delusion that the scale of the difficulties that we now face is down to him alone. He is only the most conspicuous representative of an immoral philosophy shared by at least two thirds of Tory Members, which has at its core the remorseless pursuit of the fast buck in the shortest possible time without regard to the social consequences.

Whatever his fate, the Chancellor will not be the one to pay the price for the folly that he has pursued. That fate will be suffered by the millions of shattered lives that are a consequence of his economic policy. It will be left to others to clear up the mess. It cannot be said too often, and it has been said today, that the alleged economic miracle is based on a number of unique factors that have given the Chancellor resources that no other Chancellor before has had, and that no Chancellor after him will have, at his disposal. He has had from oil revenue at least £65 billion, and, taking account of savings as a result of not having to import oil, the figure amounts, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said, to £120 billion.

The revenue from privatisation—there is no better example of the short-term folly that he has pursued than the sale of public assets—amounts to about £25 billion. Some £7·7 billion of it came from the sale of British Gas, £3·6 billion from the sale of British Telecom and at least £1 billion from the sale of Britoil. The Gracious Speech refers to the privatisation of water and electricity, and no doubt that will accrue other enormous short-term revenues, which will be squandered in the same fashion as the revenue so far accumulated.

In addition, the Chancellor has had at his disposal £31,000 million arising from the cuts that he has made in the rate support grant over the past few years, the results and the social consequences of which are clear to all, particularly to those of us who represent poorer and less prosperous areas. The provision of public housing is grinding to a halt, our inner cities are decaying, our social services are unable to cope with the casualties. Many Labour Members have been reduced to being well-paid social workers clearing up the mess created by the Chancellor and his colleagues.

All these revenues provided the Chancellor with an unprecedented opportunity and one that has never been enjoyed by any other Chancellor before him. It could have been invested in creating a sound infrastructure for future generations, in creating a strong economy able to compete with the rigours of 1992, about which we hear so much, or in providing decent living standards for all our people. What has happened? It has been used to purchase the votes of the southern middle classes with tax cuts and windfall dividends. The idea is widely abroad that one can get something for nothing—something that the Prime Minister used to deprecate. That idea will shortly be punctured, but many people have already gained something for nothing as a result of the reckless folly of selling off public assets.

At the core of what the Chancellor and his colleagues have done, which perhaps sums up the entire philosophy of the Prime Minister's Government, is that they have ruthlessly and cynically mobilised the fortunate against the unfortunate. Since, for the time being and for some years in the past, the fortunate have been in the majority, it was always inevitable that they could be mobilised by a sufficiently cynical Government. They have unleashed on our economy every species of spiv and conman known to civilisation, and created an ideology not of the wealth producer but of the looter. They have resolved the historic conflict within the Conservative party, and in the country, between the industrialists and the bankers, finally and conclusively in favour of the bankers at the expense of those who produce.

If one seeks evidence for what has happened to our country over the past nine or 10 years, one of the better illustrations is to be found in the magazine section of a W. H. Smith bookshop. There was a time when one could find many magazines devoted to the pursuit of ideas, both Left and Right. They have nearly all disappeared and they have been replaced by consumer magazines—*What Car?*, *What Computer?*, What This? and What That? I saw one the other day entitled simply *More*. I can think of no better epitaph for the economic policies of this Government.

As has been widely remarked, all this has given rise to a new breed of Conservative Members of Parliament. The gentlemen of the old school, while they still exist, have been replaced by philistines and barbarians who do not believe in treating people decently. I concede that many Tory Members believe in treating people decently, but they are a dying breed.

Where will it all end when there is nothing left to privatise, when the oil revenue is gone and when every conceivable asset has been stripped? It is no good replying, as the Chancellor sometimes does, that we have sold the assets abroad and can live on the dividends. What makes him think that the dividends will be repatriated to an economy that is on its knees?

When the time comes to clear up this mess, those who pay the price must be those who benefited. The burden must not fall, as I suspect that it may, on those who have already suffered so grevously from the Government's policy. If I seek a lasting image for the Government of the past 10 years and the economic policy that they have pursued, it is of a young couple whom I saw last week when I drove to my home in Sunderland, who were picking rubbish out of the litter bags left out in the back alleyway behind my house. They were not old; they were young.

My wife comes from Vietnam, one of the poorest countries in the world. She has lived in this country for only 18 months. The other day we saw a man picking food out of a litter bin in Hyde park and she asked me, "How is it possible in a country as rich as this for that to happen?" I had no satisfactory answer to that question. I do not understand, and it is symptomatic of the economic policy pursued by the Government that some people have to eat by taking the leftovers from litter bins.

7.59 pm

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): At this late hour I shall deal only with one point that has been raised by a number of hon. Members—concern about the overall competitiveness of our economy and especially of our manufacturing industry. I have shared that concern for many years.

There has been a great improvement since 1979, but it is not enough because our competitors have not been resting on their laurels for the past nine years and we still have not caught up with our leading competitors, the Germans, the Americans and the Japanese. I shall not detain the House by quoting figures in support of that contention, but those of us who are close to manufacturing industry are aware of them.

The abiding doubts about our economic performance as measured against those leading competitors arise as much from cultural as from economic reasons. The problem lies in our national attitude to business and especially to manufacturing industry. As a nation, we do not admire business; at best, we tolerate it and at worst we scorn it.

I have in the past drawn the House's attention to the curious alliance between the aristocratic Right and the intellectual Left, which acknowledges rationally the necessity for business, but rejects it emotionally. We see the same attitude reflected in the media which treat business with lofty and unconcealed disdain as a sort of lumpen proleteriat of our society.

I came to the House from industrial management and I have retained some contact with it. As a general rule in industry, we still require no proper management qualifications from those whom we appoint as managers. I declare an interest here as a vice-president of the Institution of Industrial Managers. We at least try to get more professionalism into industrial management, but we are by no means supported by everyone. We must beef up the professionalism of our management in industry and do more to attract a higher percentage of the brightest of our people into engineering and industrial management. We underpay our engineers and overpay our accountants. Who are accountants anyway? They are only bookkeepers with social aspirations. Until we demand higher standards of industrial management and pay for them, we shall not be truly competitive with the Americans, the Germans and the Japanese.

Those important matters are largely beyond the remedial grasp of any Chancellor of the Exchequer. They probably lie closer to that of the Secretary of State for Education and Science because their origins lie deep in our culture, in our schools and universities. Those cultural problems affect adversely our economic performance and they are further reasons for doubting whether it is given to any Government to fine-tune the economy. I do not believe that Governments have either sufficiently accurate or up-to-date information or sufficiently sensitive regulators at their disposal to fine-tune it. It is an illusion. In all my years here I have never seen a Government be successful in fine-tuning the economy. At best, they have crude instruments to work upon.

Lewis Carroll put the case graphically, as he put many other truths so graphically. When describing the little croquet match, he said:

> "The chief difficulty which Alice found first was her flamingo . . . generally, just as she had got its neck straightened out, and was going to give the hedgehog a blow with its head, it would twist round and look up in her face."

That has been the experience of many Chancellors of the Exchequer. The flamingo looks up in the Chancellor's face just when he thinks that his policies will work. We must therefore accept the Government's inability to fine-tune the economy and accept that the best that they can do is something relatively crude because so much of the action is outside their scope.

The problem of the cultural attitude to business and, above all, to manufacturing industry is one that we must solve. It will be solved not by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but by political leaders in this House showing more interest in industry and business and not making the contemptuous remarks that we so often make about those who are successful in both those endeavours.

8.5 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Tonight's debate is very significant. It opens the final act in an unfolding drama—the steepest drop in the reputation of any Chancellor of the Exchequer since the war.

Just seven months ago, the Chancellor was the toast of the City, the yuppie and the Tory Back Bencher. Tonight, his fair-weather friends on the Back Benches are sitting in sullen silence when they are not stabbing him in the back. Every prediction and boast that the Chancellor has made has been shown by events to be worthless. The Chancellor says that these are the problems of success. We see that the British economic miracle of which he boasts has been exposed as a blip in his imagination.

Let us examine the nature of the success that has given us so many problems. First, let us take inflation. The Government are presiding over an inflationary spiral unparalleled in Western Europe. Britain's inflation is now the highest of the top seven industrial nations. At 6·4 per cent. and rising to 8 per cent., according to a recent Phillips and Drew prediction, we are falling behind France, Italy, Germany, Japan and the United States.

It is simply not the case that British growth in the past couple of years has been exceptional. It has been part of a spurt of similar growth enjoyed since 1987 by other European economies, among them Spain, Portugal, Italy and even Ireland. Those economies are traditionally considered to be smaller, weaker and possibly even backward.

I do not want to stress the comparison between the British economy and those other economies. Whereas those economies will continue to grow next year by 3 or 4 per cent. according to EEC forecasts, we in the United Kingdom face yet another painful slump as the Chancellor gambles on a recession to correct his past errors. If we want to marvel at a real economic miracle, or an economy with a greater claim to an economic miracle, we should look at Italy whose economy is forecast to grow at a higher rate than ours both this year and next year. The difference is that it is growing at that rate with lower inflation and a trade deficit of less than 2 per cent. of GDP compared with our deficit which is already heading for 4 per cent. of GDP.

Every boast and claim of the Chancellor has been successfully discredited. The Government should not take refuge in their boast about the budget surplus which was achieved only through their cruel meanness towards the benefit claimants and old-age pensioners who alone have lost £4 billion since the Government stopped linking their pensions with their earnings. Even the Chancellor's proud boast that this is a tax-cutting Government is rejected by his friends when the total of the direct and indirect tax burden remains

> "higher than at any time under the last Labour Government."

That is not my opinion, but the judgment of Sam Brittan, writing in the *Financial Times*.

Taxes, including social security contributions and rates, are equivalent to 38 per cent. of GDP, which is higher than in 1979 and higher than at any time during the period of the last Labour Government. Even the money supply, the favourite indicator for monetarists everywhere, is now growing beyond the Chancellor's prediction and at the same rate as in 1972 under the very Government that this Government so much deride. As for the balance of payments, the trade deficit is now £14 billion or £15 billion. There is no economic miracle. Instead, we see the return of the same old British disease, and it is returning with a vengeance.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Macdonald: No. I have only 10 minutes and I shall press on.

The Government's entire strategy is now in complete disarray. The much-vaunted economic miracle is sadly just another old-fashioned consumer boom, a Barber boom mark II. That judgment is not confined to Labour Members and political allies of the Labour party. It is arrived at even by the Government's friends. Lord Rees-Mogg made the same point in an article in *The Independent*.

Now is the time for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to introduce a mini Budget to restore investment in neglected roads and railways, in training and in education. Without investment in basic economic assets, the country can have no future. Of course, the Chancellor of the Exchequer does not like mini Budgets. During his Budget speech, he boasted that the Government kept to one Budget a year. The right hon. Gentleman argues that interest rates are the only feasible economic tool worth using. It could be said that each interest rate increase is for the Chancellor of the Exchequer a mini Budget. Until last week, we had had 12 interest rate rises in the year. We now have the 13th and the rate is 13 per cent. In the words of President Reagan, when it comes to interest rates, it appears to be a case of making it one more for the Gipper. Surely the time has come for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to follow the path of his equally erring predecessor, Lord Barber, out of the Treasury into a quiet and undeservedly well-paid sinecure in the City.

8.12 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): One of the themes that has run through the debate is inflation, and many of us remember the times of high inflation and the tremendous hardships that that brought. The argument has been less about the disease—I think that we all realise the evils of inflation—and more about the nature of the possible cures that are available to us. To take the analogy of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), how many different types of golf club does my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer have to tackle the problem?

The two remedies that have been most cogently argued by Opposition Members as alternatives to the path chosen by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer are the old remedies of higher taxes and a credit squeeze. We remember the remedy of the credit squeeze from the 1960s and 1970s. Higher taxes have a serious effect on the economy. We remember the experimentation in high taxes which started after the 1964 general election, when direct taxes were raised to an extremely high level to fund a massive increase in public expenditure. Those taxes cut growth in the economy. They caused a wage-price spiral and increased the expectations of many people who did not regard what they were earning as a gross figure, as economists told them that they should, but took the more rational view that the sum that they received after paying tax was more important.

Higher taxes have two effects on the economy, both of which are bad. The problem is made the greater because of the way the Government spend the taxes that they raise. Consumer spending is increased because of the redistribution that may occur through indirect taxation and Government expenditure.

Credit controls are a much more interesting experiment, and the Opposition have been suggesting that they are a potential alternative to raising interest rates. We have tried introducing credit controls on many occasions in the past. Indeed, they had a certain ability to work in the economy as it once was. I am talking of the time when the economy was much more closed than it is now. My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) said that when we had a closed economy we could restrict the ability of domestic banks to lend. We could put political pressure on them. We could even put laws into place to stop domestic banks being able to provide the credit that was demanded by domestic consumers especially. If we were not careful, credit controls cut credit to industry. That meant that we ended up with many exceptions to the controls. We found that the exceptions started to outnumber the opportunities for restricting the availability of credit to such an extent that the controls ceased to be effective.

We now have an open market. No longer do we have the ability to stop those who are denied credit from one source obtaining it from another. The credit can be found from overseas from foreign banks, which may be active in our domestic market, or through the various financial intermediary mechanisms that are now so sophisticated that even the domestic mortgage market is increasingly financed by money that originates from outside the United Kingdom. We have an open market and credit controls would be an impossibility. Indeed, they would have no chance of working without the imposition, or reimposition, of exchange controls.

Exchange controls had ceased to work to any real extent when they were abolished in 1979. They were a problem for tourists who wished to leave the country to travel and spend money overseas, but they had ceased to be a problem for any company that wished to raise money overseas. Similarly, they had ceased to be a problem for any foreign company that wished to raise sterling in this country. Any method of exchange control that was introduced had to have many loopholes if it was to circumvent the real demands of the international market.

We have had some comments about the problems that may be created in the City and the benefits that the City may derive from high interest rates. It is worth remembering that the City, or the financial sector, employs over 1 million and generates over £5 billion in net earnings.

[Mr. Matthew Carrington]

The development and growth of the City is something that we should and need to protect. That is one reason why exchange controls should not return.

Exchange controls lead on, perhaps, to the other solution that is sometimes suggested, which is the manipulation of the exchange rate. That manipulation is now an impossibility, if only because the volumes that are traded in the international market are so large. It has been suggested that we should push down our exchange rate or fix it against other currencies. That is fine at an instant in time, but it is difficult, as we have seen with the rise in United States base rates, to predict what will happen to other currencies. It is rather like looking at the bird in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" that turns its head and stares at us. We may think that we have one solution, but the other countries against whose currencies we have fixed sterling may manipulate their currencies away from sterling.

The real problem is house mortgage lending and the leakage from it. The leakage in 1987 was about £14·6 billion, which was half the total sum raised in the house mortgage markets and about three times the rise in consumer credit. It is that leakage which has led to consumer spending, which to a large extent has led to the balance of payments problem that we now face. How best do we control the leakage? My feeling is that the leakage itself is not that much of a problem. If we examine the asset base that underlines the leakage and the borrowing that the house mortgage market represents, the gearing for the borrowing is only about 17 per cent. That is still a relatively low level, although I quite accept and understand that on an income basis the strain on the income ratio is actually higher and more serious. However, that is a short-term problem rather than a structural problem. If there were a higher ratio on the asset base, there would be a more serious problem.

The real difficulty arises from the low savings ratio. Our savings ratio is a highly questionable figure. Many areas of dispute have arisen over the accuracy of our savings ratio figure, if only because the figure is calculated by subtracting one very large number from another and is therefore subject to the inherent volatility and uncertainty of those two numbers. I suspect that we would all agree that the personal savings ratio is too low.

One of the major challenges facing the Government is to raise the personal savings ratio. High interest rates are a start and I believe that they will push up the savings ratio —*[Interruption.]* I beg the House's pardon for the frog in my throat. It must have been caused by the comments made yesterday by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) about the frogs that left the marshes as they were drained. I should like to see measures taken to increase the savings ratio and to encourage personal savings.

8.21 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I want to comment first on the behaviour of Conservative Members during the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). I do not normally make attacks on Conservative Members because that is usually a waste of time and is non-productive. Today, however, we saw a concerted and disgraceful attempt by Conservative Members to disrupt my hon. Friend's speech. That was clearly a tremendous compliment to my hon. Friend because it showed that Conservative Members feared his effectiveness in exposing their economic mismanagement and the Chancellor's incompetence displayed in his Budget speech. At one point this afternoon, Mr. Speaker urged the Front Benches to set the lead. The Government Front Bench set an example by smirking and sniggering during the organised disruption of my hon. Friend's speech. That suggested foreknowledge of what was about to happen.

Many people feel that the Government would stoop to any level to silence criticism of their record. I know that the Chancellor of the Exchequer does not like it, but his track record merits repeated examination. His Budget forecast the trade deficit at £4 billion, his Autumn Statement forecast £14 billion, and after the latest figures who knows what the ultimate figure will be—certainly not the Chancellor who is supposed to be in the economy's driving seat.

Imports have flooded into Britain, increasing by 12 per cent. this year while in contrast exports have risen by only 1·5 per cent. The Chancellor has increased demand far beyond the capacity of our industry to supply that demand. Those bottlenecks reveal the lack of investment in industry and training that has occurred under this Government. The lion's share of the deficit lies in Britain's manufacturing. The balance of trade in manufactured goods fell sharply into deficit in 1983 and has continued to deteriorate. That reflects the disastrous and dogmatic approach of the Government in 1979 towards manufacturing industry when they pursued their monstrous economic dogma and slaughtered manufacturing industry in this country.

The Chancellor's only response to the deficit has been to raise interest rates again and again. Home buyers and industry are hardest hit by the interest rate rises. The average mortgage payer faces a monthly increase of £30. That should be contrasted with the £12 a month in tax cuts. Even people regarded as the Government's friends, like the CBI, have responded. At the recent CBI conference industrialists warned that high borrowing costs were strangling their companies. They even passed democratically a resolution complaining that the level of interest rates has damaged the international competitiveness of sterling.

Another criterion by which we can judge the Chancellor is inflation. Inflation is now 6·4 per cent. and rising. The Chancellor has admitted that it may reach 7 per cent. in the next seven months irrespective of any other independent forecasts. As hon. Members have rightly stated during the debate, the United Kingdom's inflation level is among the highest of our industrial competitors. Charges for water and electricity are being pushed up in preparation for give-away privatisation and we have seen the onward thrust of inflation as the result of the Government's policies. The mortgage rate increases are the biggest single contribution to the rise in inflation. No wonder the Chancellor would like to remove mortgage rates from the retail prices index. That is another case of Nero fiddling the figures while the country suffers.

Let us be clear. The rise in the inflation rate has been stoked by the Government. If we consider the balance of trade, interest rates and inflation, it is obvious that they have all been a disaster for the Chancellor and hardly merit the description of brilliant.

The Chancellor strutted on to the parliamentary stage on the day of the Budget as the hero of his Back Benchers. What a contrast now. The jury is indeed out on the Chancellor and the forewoman of that jury is waiting for the opportunity to announce the verdict, and is desperate to carry out the sentence.

The Government's strategy gives no hope to the unemployed and it accentuates the north-south divide. We have levels of unemployment in Scotland well above the national average. The Government are doing nothing to give hope to us or to the more deprived areas of England. The tragedy is that ordinary people are suffering and the Government refuse to act, purely and simply to try to preserve their fig leaf of economic credibility.

The events this year have been a watershed in the public's perceptions of the Tories' handling of the economy. The Government continue to make comparisons with the Labour Government, but they forget to mention that they have had the benefit of North sea oil and the massive income from selling the nation's assets even at knock-down privatisation prices. The Government have used those benefits to bribe the electorate to achieve election victories, as all Tory Governments have done in the past.

The reaction on the Conservative Benches to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East shows that they understand that they have reached the end of the road. An old cliché states that when the going gets tough, the tough get going. The country is getting it tough, but the Chancellor should be going, right out of No. 11 Downing street.

8.27 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The speech opening the debate from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) would have gone down well in a debating chamber if the audience had no knowledge of economics or economic policy. Sadly for him that was not the case today, and I suspect that that is why he did not give way when some of us tried to help him understand the statistics that he was abusing. He simply failed to admit that the economy is intrinsically extremely healthy. It is not only Conservative Members who state that. The most recent survey from the OECD highlighted the supply side impact on the economy of the Government's policies which have been most important in our progress since 1979.

In comparison with 1979, we now have a shrunken state sector; a public sector budget surplus; less interference in industry; fewer regulations and controls; lower personal and corporate tax rates and fewer tax-induced distortions. The restoration of the market economy has been supported by a reduction in trade union restrictive practices and the deregulation of the labour and financial sectors.

That is an extremely good record, of which we can be justly proud. It has had some very important net effects. For example, Opposition Members have not noticed that investment in this country is ahead of consumption. That is a key indicator. Manufacturing investment in the past 12 months has been up 18 per cent. Productivity is high and likely to stay high. It is important to analyse imports in the latest trade figures because imports of capital goods rose 4 per cent. during the past three months, and that increase in investment shows that the continuing increase in productivity is likely to be secured.

If it is true—I concede that it is—that in our economy consumption has run ahead of domestic supply, who is borrowing more and saving less? It is clearly not industry. Industry has restored cash balances. There was a net real rate of return for industry of just over 9 per cent. in 1987, the highest for 20 years—a significant factor which should be taken into account when considering the impact of interest rates. In 1987, according to the latest figures, corporate savings were £46 billion out of a total of £69 billion of trading profits—a remarkable percentage.

Therefore, industry is not likely to be as damaged as it was before by higher interest rates. It may be that they will cause industry difficulty with its exports because of an increase in the value of sterling, but higher interest rates are more likely to force companies to restrain their wage increases and in those circumstances they will not find their export opportunities damaged. Some Opposition Members would find it instructive to look closely at the policies of Ludwig Erhardt in Germany in the 1960s when he pursued policies that had a similar virtuous effect on German exporters.

It is also important to note that industry is hurt several times more by a 1 per cent. increase in wages than by a 1 per cent. increase in interest rates, something that I hope industrialists will bear in mind if they ever try to complain to the Chancellor about his current policy.

Secondly, is it the Government who are borrowing too much and spending too much? The answer is no, because the public sector surplus is £10 billion and there is a declining trend in public expenditure as a proportion of national income. That gives expenditure programmes greater flexibility without an increase in total spending because of the reduction in debt servicing costs. That is an important point, which again seems to have escaped those Opposition Members who have spoken today.

Thirdly—here I accept that there is a difficulty—there is the private sector. In the past three years the personal savings ratio has fallen from 10 per cent. to 4 per cent. That fact alone has led to a 2 per cent. per annum rise in consumption. I understand that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) said, the figures may be unreliable and Tim Congdow has recently done some interesting work on the personal and corporate savings ratios. But there is no doubt that the Government's overall thrust should be to tackle the increase in personal consumption.

I support the use of higher interest rates. That policy is also supported by Professor Alan Budd, whose recent work has shown that in the short run high interest rates nowadays bear more heavily on consumption than on investment. He also demonstrates that income tax changes unequivocally bear more heavily on consumption than investment, but they take a long time to do so and to do a deflationary job. Therefore, the Government's interest rate policy is the right one.

Several Opposition Members bemoan the fact that the Chancellor cut the highest rates of tax, thus stimulating the economy in the long term. But even if one assumes that the £1 billion that was raised from tax cuts went entirely in consumption this year, it would have had only a marginal effect on the current balance of payments problem. Opposition Members have things completely out of perspective. I wish that they would try to look at the figures in the right context.

There is another weapon that the Chancellor can use and I hope that, given the time that interest rates will take

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

to bite properly into personal consumption, he will be able to look at this at the next Budget. Like other right hon. and hon. Members, I am referring to savings.

It is especially important when trying to encourage personal savings to promote investment in risks—in other words, equities. Let me be controversial and ask the Chancellor to look closely at whether we should allow the £30,000 mortgage relief to be available on share investments as well. Let me ask the Chancellor to look closely at the personal equity plan and dramatically to change the limits that are currently imposed on it. Will the Treasury consider profit-related pay and, instead of making it possible to have a cash bonus, make those bonuses payable in shares, particularly in shares in the company for which people work?

I have recently written a pamphlet "Fair Shares for all the Workers" urging employee share ownership schemes. The House will be glad to know that I do not have time to read it out, but I hope that they will avail themselves of the copy that is in the Library. Employee share ownership schemes are an important way not only of increasing the access to capital investment by the British people, but of giving them a greater commitment to the success of the company for which they work, and I commend them.

Saving encouragement should be used to bring the personal sector in line with the prudence shown by industry and Government. The economy is fundamentally sound. We have a problem with personal consumption and that has caused a difficulty on the overall balance of payments. But it is clear that we have a Chancellor who is prepared to take the right action when the statistics show that it needs to be taken, and who will not throw away the tremendous developments that Britain has made since 1979 in freeing the economy and giving the British people not only a pride in their country but an ability to participate in it through the wider share ownership and other schemes that the Government have introduced.

8.36 pm

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): It is a little over a year since black Monday 19 October 1987 and the stock exchange collapse which wiped about $2 trillion off the value of shares on the world exchanges in three days.

In the words of the *Financial Times* a couple of weeks ago:

> "At the time it looked . . . and felt . . .like an earthquake, an event that would change the economic direction of the world."

The spectre of another 1929, of a stock exchange collapse followed by a world economic slump, was propounded on both Left and Right in the House and outside.

Instead, paradoxically, we have seen a further expansion of the economies of the western world, with an average growth rate of 3·5 per cent. in developing countries which is expected to rise to 4 per cent. next year.

What is really interesting is that the doubts that were expressed 12 months ago still remain. The attention that today's debate has received demonstrates that, and rightly, because the problems that faced us some 12 months ago are far from solved.

The Chancellor is no longer the emperor of the world. Even within the Conservative party the critics and the doubters multiply. Among the more sober analysts outside the House, that trend is much more marked—indeed, it is exponential. During the Budget debate I hazarded the idea that the Chancellor would become known as the emperor without any clothes, and that is becoming more and more evident every day, even if it is not a particularly pretty thought.

Before the stock exchange collapse in 1929 the economic cycle had already begun to plummet, unlike in October last year. Production reached a peak in April 1929 in Germany, in June in America and in July in Britain. In America, manufacturing production dropped 20 per cent. between August and October 1929. The crash that followed was based on a tight money policy which led to a large number of bankruptcies. It led to the Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930, which provoked a world trade war. Protectionism, competitive devaluation and similar measures transformed the recession into a deep slump in which millions of people throughout the world suffered.

Sixty years on we have a different world with a more integrated economy. That was shown by the suddenness and universality of the October 1987 crash. On that occasion the group of seven countries attempted to learn from the experience of 1929 and tried to ward off the recession by pumping $100 billion into the United States economy. At the same time, particularly in this country, there were policies of increased Government spending, cheaper credit and tax handouts to the rich. There has been a reflation in all major Western economies, but nowhere more than in Britain where the Government have doubled the money supply over the past two years.

The fact that there has not been a similar increase in the production of capital goods and commodities has led to an increase in inflation. It is already 6·4 per cent. in Britain and 4·6 per cent. in America. With the exception of West Germany, it is rising in all the countries of the Western world.

The Chancellor said there will be no change. In fact, since last October the Government's policies have marked a fundamental change in the monetarist policies that the Government followed in the previous eight years. Continuing to reflate will lead to the same consequences as those which occurred in 1973 and 1974 when inflation in the OECD countries averaged 14 per cent. and reached 25 to 30 per cent. in some countries, including Britain. After a small change in policy towards inflation the Chancellor is now using the crudest of monetary weapons—a rapid increase in interest rates and a return to stop-go policies, which he has decried in the past.

The Chancellor faces a twin dilemma. There is stagflation—economic stagnation with high inflation—or a continuation of high interest rates which, as has been said, will lead to a fall in investment in productive industry, over-valuation of the pound, a fall in British exports, and an increase in our trade deficit.

The Chancellor talks as if Britain is an isolated island cut off from the rest of the world and as if it did not feel the effects of the American economy. In America the trade deficit is rising. It is over $170 billion and the budget deficit is $135 billion. American interest rates are rising as our interst rates rise, and the strength of the dollar increases as the strength of the pound increases. However, there is still the danger, as there was a year ago, of an increasing trade war and restrictions on world trade which will lead to a world recession. That would have appalling consequences, particularly for Britain. Countries such as Japan will have to seek other markets in Europe, as will West Germany. Thirty per cent. of our manufacturing base has been destroyed and our productivity is one third to a half less than that of our major competitors. Manufacturers are already complaining about the lack of a skilled or trained work force.

With those problems Britain will face a desperate economic position. Those who want to talk about a market economy should look at the world in which we live with its booms and slumps which affect the lives of millions. There is a net transfer of financial resources from developing to advanced countries in excess of $30 billion per year. That is leading to appalling conditions in those countries. There are still 20 million people unemployed in the OECD countries, and in Britain at least one third of the population lives in poverty and at least two fifths have not benefited from the policies of the Government and have lower living standards.

We should not forget the social consequences of the Government's policies. In an editorial in *The Sunday Telegraph* Peregrine Worsthorne said that the Government

> "fail to grasp the depth of outrage done to socialist-minded people by this Government; far greater outrage than was ever done to Tory-minded people by any Labour Government. Just imagine what the state of Tory opinion would have been if a Labour Government had ever felt strong enough to introduce a swingeing wealth tax, abolish the public schools, nationalise the Oxbridge colleges, prohibit fox hunting, proscribe titles and turn Whites' Club into a GLC creche".

He went on to say:

> "There is no gratitude in politics. Those who have benefited from the Thatcherite revolution won't thank her if they see their gains eroded".

He ended by saying:

> "Not only has she trampled on genuine ideals with deep roots in our national history but enjoyed doing so. In economic good times this did not matter. But if economic times turn downwards . . . it could matter a lot."

The Government's economic philosophy is based on the belief that there is a choice between the bureaucratic state-owned economies of the East and the free-for-all market economy they preach. I believe that there is another choice—a democratic socialist choice—where the state intervenes in society, not in a bureaucratic way but democratically, with the full involvement of the producers and consumers in our society.

8.46 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I wish to contribute to the debate from the perspective of someone who spent 15 years of her working life before coming to the House in business. I started a business from scratch and worked it up producing goods, selling them, importing, exporting, understanding the significance of the value of money, and buying and selling foreign currencies in order to trade.

There has been much talk today based on political or economic dogma, whether it is Marxists who believe that one should control everything, including exchange, the Keynesians who believe that one can manufacture money and create businesses out of that, or the monetarists who believe that one can manipulate the money supply to control the economy.

I started my business in the early 1970s and lived through the horrors of the rampaging inflation experienced under the Labour Administration. Wilson's weasel words about the pound in our pockets not being devalued are carved on my heart because at that time I was heavily involved in importing bits and pieces and I suffered badly. I almost lost my business as a result of that economic interference. Therefore, I am no lover of Government interference in the economy.

The tremendous success that our Government have achieved in righting the economy was predicted on the degree to which they left the economy alone. They reduced tax rates so that people could make their own decisions about what to do with their money. The Government abolished exchange controls, which was a brilliant move by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's predecessor. It freed people to spend money in the world market as they saw fit. The golden thread that has run through our economic success has been lack of intervention in economic matters. It is for that reason that it troubles me that we have now taken to the "touch on the tiller" mentality, which is what altering the interest rate is about.

We are in danger of impaling ourselves on that dogma. It is extremely important to take stock of the effect that such an idea is having on our business community. Business is about producing and exchanging goods. In reality it does not matter whether it takes place with foreigners or within our domestic market. It is nonsense to suggest that exporting has some intrinsically greater value than does selling goods domestically. That is like saying it is better to sell in Billericay than in Birmingham, Bradford or anywhere else. It is a subjective judgment of what economics and the economy, the business world, is all about.

If I had to buy foreign currency to purchase goods abroad, the money markets would adjust their values accordingly. If I wanted to buy an Hitachi television set, that would be taken into account by those who deal in currencies. To create artificial values for currency is to interfere with the natural market process. To try to tie the rudder of a ship so that it can no longer steer between the rocks is very dangerous. The same is true of trying to control exchange or interest rates in the interests of balancing the economy.

The concept of the balance of the economy is absurd. It really does not matter whether, at any particular time, we export more than we import or vice versa. If the economy is left to settle, it will balance itself. The level of the exchange rate—the value of money—shows what the world market thinks about the way our economy is going. That is what should decide the issue. To try to control that pivot point create difficulties.

Why are we trying to control the economy? Is it because of inflation? We all know, because my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have said so often, that inflation is created by politicians, not by business men, the greedy consumer who wants to buy more goods, or even trade unionists. It is an artificial extension of the money supply. Only the Government, by reducing the difference between their expenditure and taxation, can do anything about that. Trying to manipulate people's buying habits—which, to some extent, we are doing by raising the cost of money—will not succeed. We should allow exchange and interest rates to float and then the economy will balance.

We have heard a great deal about the need to increase savings. It has been said that raising interest rates will somehow induce people to save more. Japan faced many economic problems during the 1950s. In an attempt to encourage savings, which I accept is an important aspect of a healthy economy, it exempted interest on savings from taxation. That had a stunning effect on the level of savings

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

which, in turn, produced the capital on which the success of the Japanese economy since then has been based. In addition, the then Japanese Chancellor reduced and stabilised the rate of taxation to a flat rate of 30 per cent. Those are the sorts of measures that will bring the economy into balance.

I do not believe that manipulating interest rates is the way out of what we perceive to be a dilemma, although I do not think that there is a balance of payments crisis. We have a healthy economy and we have put more money into people's pockets. People naturally want to spend it, which in turn increases the domestic market. Of course, some of that money will be spent abroad, and there is no great harm in that. It is not a tragedy. The Japanese do not eat the money that they obtain from our buying their goods and services; they do not stick it in a box under the bed —they spend it in Britain by investing in factories or buying our goods. They exchange it in the money markets for other currencies. It is absurd to suggest that there is something intrinsically bad about importing goods.

Increasing interest rates causes many difficulties for the business community. Big businesses may well have large savings, but small businesses are almost always working on overdrafts. Before my right hon. Friend thinks of raising interest rates again, I ask him to consider the basic policy of the economist Hayek, whose views I greatly respect, which is to allow the exchange and interest rates to float.

8.55 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Today, in the face of another devastating and effective critique of the Chancellor's strategy, the right hon. Gentleman's credit ran out. It was foolish of him to claim that the Opposition motion does not refer to inflation when it specifically regrets

> "the way in which current policies have pushed up mortgage rates and other prices and charges".

Some of us had previously only suspected that the Chancellor was an economic illiterate. If the recent price rises do not constitute inflation, the Chancellor must explain what does.

The truth is that the term "inflation" is now as embarrassing to the Government as the term "unemployment" has been hitherto. It will have come as no surprise to the House today to hear the Chancellor attempting to modify the definition of "inflation"—no doubt the first of many—so that he could achieve a reduction in the same way that the Government changed the methods of recording unemployment to mask its real level.

If the Chancellor is right in saying that the real level of inflation is less than the Treasury figures because mortgage rises are included, how will he explain that to the millions of families in London who are now paying £20 a week more for their mortgages than they were at this time last year? How can he say that that is not inflation? For the 100,000 home owners in Edinburgh, and almost 1 million throughout Scotland, the rise in mortgage rates since the Budget has burdened them with an average monthly increase of £30. For thousands of home owners in my constituency and others, the rises so far this year have added £1,000 to £2,0000 to their annual repayments. The next mortgage rate increase will be a direct result of the Chancellor's 1 per cent. increase last Friday. That will deal a crippling blow to hundreds of thousands of home owners. The Chancellor will add another record to his collection—the record number of mortgage defaults, although in fact he already holds that record.

The Chancellor will live to regret his failure today to take action to help mortgagors. Many of the poorer home owners cannot live with that. Indeed, it is not only home owners who have suffered since the March Budget— tenants have had to bear rent increases of more than 8 per cent., almost twice the March rate of inflation, and electricity price rises of 9 per cent. That has also hit industrial and commercial competitiveness. The householders who have been hardest hit by the price rises that the Government have forced on consumers are the 10 million senior citizens who spend a higher proportion of their income on fuel than do the remainder of the population.

One of the 14,000 senior citizens in my constituency telephoned me this morning to comment on the latest pronouncement emanating from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, who said at the weekend that fuel costs were low and that state benefits meant that old people should have no problems keeping warm. This latest advice is part of a series of advisory notes, including advice to pensioners to start knitting to beat the winter chill and to sell their assets so that they can take out health insurance in the private sector.

Like the Chancellor, the Under-Secretary is out of touch with reality. As Age Concern has said today, the reality is benefit cuts, with senior citizens waiting months for any cash help. The reality is that the Help the Aged's winter warmth line has received more than 1,000 calls in the past 10 days from people who cannot afford to heat their homes. The reality is that pensioner couples should have had in their hands every week £18 more from this Government to spend on their fuel bills, but the breaking in 1980 of the link between pay and pension rises has allowed the Chancellor an extra £5 billion this year alone. Last Friday the Chancellor said that from next October £200 million of that would go back to the pensioners.

Today, the Chancellor had the chance to state how he would use the remaining £4·8 billion that he has taken from the pensioners to help them. However, as we know, the Chancellor has already given that money to help those on top earnings. He has not invested in our senior citizens or in industry. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said that industry was destroyed in this country in the 1980s—and all to no purpose. It is no wonder that the Chancellor declined to take any interventions today, especially from his hon. Friends. He knows that, however cogent the arguments and no matter how scathing the criticism of him by the Opposition, it is nothing to the criticisms coming from his own side. He knows that when his right hon. Friend, the former Prime Minister, criticised the Chancellor's "insensitivity to other members of the Community", he was referring to the EEC, but it is equally true that the Chancellor is insensitive to the needs of our own community.

The nine increases in interest rates since the March Budget have made it impossible for the business community to finance investment by borrowing. The millions of men and women languishing on the dole know the real price of the Government's economic failure.

The Chancellor has recently received some bad news and some very bad news. The bad news came in the widespread criticism of his policies by his right hon. Friends the Members for Guildford (Mr. Howell) and for Brentford and Isleworth (Sir B. Hayhoe). The very bad news is that he now has some support from the City—from those very people who less than a month ago he was castigating as making forecasts that were even more inaccurate than his own.

Today, the Chancellor had two opportunities. One was to announce an investment programme for training and for industry, to stop almost limitless credit eroding our home economy, to take action to reduce interest and mortgage rates and to help businesses and people. The other was for the Chancellor to help himself by giving a convincing defence of his financial strategy. He has failed, and the country is paying for his failure.

9.2 pm

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): The hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) said that Conservative Members were sitting sullen faced and were fair-weather friends to the Chancellor. I wish to place on record the fact that I support the Chancellor in what he is doing now, as I did in March. I do not believe that the Chancellor has it wrong in having to temper the economy slightly because of the large balance of payments deficit. Some of us are determined to defend the Government's record, believe that we have it right, and that the economy is still strong.

Of course, the Labour party has a considerable problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) said that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) knew no economics. He certainly knows no economic history, because those Conservative Members who remember the last Labour Government will recall the appalling record left to us in 1979. We will take no lectures from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East or from his right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey, who has been noticeable by his absence from every economic debate since he left office as Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1979.

All the indicators as to the prosperity of our economy show just how well off people are. Since 1979 the man on average earnings has had a 27 per cent. increase in his take-home pay, after taking account of price rises. A man on half average earnings is 20 per cent. better off in real terms and pensioners, whom the Opposition often use as a pawn in their campaigns, are 25 per cent. better off.

One has only to look around Britain today to see the prosperity. Some 67 per cent. of people own their own homes, which is a larger percentage than in any other European country. That is the mark of wealth creation and the wealth of interest in home ownership that ordinary people have. I am delighted that this party has been the party for a home-owning democracy in spite of the objections from the Opposition, who when we started to sell council houses objected and said that the tenants would not buy them. Yet eight or nine years later 1 million tenants own their own homes and have a stake in our society.

The Opposition have complained about the increase in mortgage rates, but only a few weeks ago they were complaining about the increases in house prices. They should make sure that they look at both sides of the coin. Of course mortgage rate increases are not welcome to any of us who own our homes and who know about the problems of our constituents.

Labour Members have complained about the north-south divide and the fact that house prices in the north are cheaper than in the south. They then complained, however, when house prices started to go up. Now that we are taking measures to ensure that house price increases slow down, as they are doing, they complain about that.

The Opposition have also complained that, in recent months, working people have had a certain amount of money taken from their pockets. Of course everyone regrets that mortgage rates have gone up, but we should also remember that the Labour party has voted against every tax cut since 1979. If it had had its way, we would have a tax rate of 34p in the pound. For Opposition Members to complain about people having to pay extra in mortgage interest is rich when they have objected to any cut in people's income tax rate since 1979. Those cuts have put money in people's pockets. I find it astonishing that Opposition Members can look us straight in the face.

The Opposition have complained about inflation. I concede that the inflation rate has run between 6 and 7 per cent. and that is unacceptably high, but there is not one month in this Parliament when it has come within a mile of the Labour party's record when it was 9 per cent. at its lowest rate. How dare the Opposition lecture us about inflation when, in five years, the Labour Government never got the inflation rate down to anywhere near what the Chancellor of the Exchequer has achieved.

Concern has been expressed about the effect of interest rates on small businesses. I have grave concern for the small businesses of my constituency and the family farms which suffer when mortgage and interest rates increase. The Labour party has failed to recognise, however, that 80 per cent. of the increase in the balance of payments deficit has been caused by demand from the consumer. Therefore, it is obvious that if interest rates, which affect the mortgage rate, are increased, that has a quicker and more effective dampening effect on consumer demand than any other measure.

Today business liquidity means that industry is much better able to stand up to an increase in interest rates than it ever was when the Labour party was in office. Opposition Members should consider their party's record before they lecture us.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East called for top taxpayers to have their tax cuts taken away. That policy equals cutting off one's nose to spite one's face. Opposition Members have not noticed that all the evidence, international and national, suggests that, when taxes are cut, the tax yield increases. That is true in this country where the top taxpayers, instead of paying 24 per cent. of the total tax yield, now pay 29 per cent. That is true of the far east, Japan, and the United States, and of every country where taxes have been cut. Conversely, in Belgium and Ireland where taxes have been increased, the tax yield has fallen. That is a recipe for disaster.

A tax-cutting policy has been successful, but tax increases would have the opposite effect. It is strange that, even after all the international evidence, Opposition Members continue to believe that theirs is the right policy.

I believe that tax cuts are a moral imperative. We are talking about the earnings of individual people. The state does not own people's earnings. The Opposition believe that the public are only entitled to pocket money which can be taken away from them at the whim of the state. In 1947, Douglas Jay put it better than anybody else in the "Socialist Case" when he said that the men in Whitehall

[Mr. Nicholas Bennett]

knew best. Some 40 years on, the Opposition still believe that, despite nationalisation and all the disasters of state control. They still believe that the Government can put their hands into people's pockets and control their money. It is no accident that it is in those countries where the state controls people's earnings, their jobs and their homes that political freedom is largely negated. Contrast this with countries where people keep their own money and they have democratic freedom as well.

We must remember that we have a problem with the balance of payments—2·75 per cent. of gross domestic product. But I remember that, under the Government led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and the previous Labour Government, it was 3·8 per cent. of GDP in 1974. In fact, in four out of the five years of the previous Labour Government, there was a balance of payments deficit at a far higher percentage of GDP than there has ever been under this Government. Let us remember that. When we consider the Government's record, we should contrast it with the alternatives that have been put forward in the past few years and support the policy of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

9.11 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): This debate has now lasted for nearly 40 hours and no fewer than 137 right hon. and hon. Members have taken part. With due deference to the brilliant contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), it is fair to say that no speech exceeded in wit and wisdom that of the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), at the beginning of the debate.

The debate has been long and, at times, interesting. It has been so long that when it began the words "last month's trade deficit" meant only £500 million and the Chancellor's pallid features were attributed to a night on the tiles which, by coincidence, was in my constituency. He did not tell me that he was visiting Camden Town, but I suppose that he can claim that a 1960s night at the Camden Palace scarcely counts as an official visit by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Whatever the original causes of the Chancellor's pallor, we can be sure that when he heard the latest trade figures, in the words of Procul Harum's 1967 hit,

> "His face at first just ghosty turned a whiter shade of pale."

The Chancellor could scarcely listen to the other chart-topping hits of 1967 without an uncanny feeling that they were predicting what has happened to him this year, starting with "I'm a Believer", moving on to "Puppet on a String", then—I assume a reference to the tapes—"Silence is Golden" and ending the year with "Let the Heartaches Begin".

On the strength of the ministerial contributions to this debate—not many of the contributors are present—I have increasing sympathy with the Prime Minister's view—she is not present either—that no one in the Cabinet is fit to be Prime Minister. Unfortunately for the right hon. Lady, to judge by her speech, that goes for her as well. If we look at the Treasury Bench, which is finally adorned by the Chancellor, it is easy to discern—or would be if they were here—several examples of the saddest of all Cabinet creatures—former next leaders of the Tory party. It is hard to see who is still left in the race. If I were asked where the smart money should go, I would suggest that Catford dog track any Monday, Wednesday or Saturday was a better bet than any of the Tories present.

The Secretary of State for Social Security, who is a television voice-over made flesh, was tipped as a likely successor to the Prime Minister just 18 months ago. Now, ravaged by circumstance and by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), he seems only half the man he was and the Prime Minister has made certain that he is only half the Secretary of State he was.

Next, we should consider the new half of the Department of Health and Social Security job-share, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). As many hon. Members know, it is not difficult to be an unpopular Minister if one is strapped for cash, but it takes real genius to give the nurses what he claims is an almost £1,000 million pay increase and to be even more unpopular. One of his hon. Friends told me that he is being tough with the nurses to promote his chances of becoming Prime Minister. What an illustration of the state of mind of Tory Back Benchers!

We are told that the Secretary of State for Education and Science has ambitions in the direction of 10 Downing street. His friends told him that if he really wanted to get there, he would have to make the supreme sacrifice. Nothing daunted, he did. He sacrificed the education of a generation of children to the turmoil of competitive tests for seven-year-olds, open enrolment and opting out. To add insult to injury, he then asserts that progressive education authorities, such as the Inner London education authority, are spending too much money educating each secondary school child—that is despite spending at least twice as much himself on the education of each of his children.

I turn now to the Secretary of State for the Environment, who is also not gracing us with his presence tonight. Even his best friend would not dream of suggesting him as a suitable leader for the Tory party—at least not since the passage of the Reform Act 1832. He is a man so arrogant that he was once accurately described by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) as the only man in the world who can strut sitting down.

The right hon. Gentleman does not let his principles get in the way of his seat in the Cabinet. We remember him of yore as deregulator Ridley, the bonfire of controls, who said that everything should be left to market forces. He presents an unconvincing face as the Lord Protector of the Environment and purveyor of sweet water to the lower classes. He is the man who produced a White Paper on housing without mentioning the homeless—the people most in need of a home of their own. That may have been carelessness but his omission of another word is criminal negligence.

In 1985, the right hon. Gentleman set the priorities for London Transport in an 838-word letter. The one word that he never mentioned was safety. The fire at King's Cross killed 31 people because, like him, London Transport did not think that safety was important. Many more would have died but for the presence of mind of the station staff, police, fire fighters ambulance staff, doctors and nurses. Anyone who reads the Fennell report will know that deeds were done that night that went far beyond the call of duty.

Later, to their credit, the chairmen of London Regional Transport and of London Underground accepted their share of the blame and resigned. Why did the buck stop there? What about the man who set their priorities and fixed their budgets, and who told the House that he would be accountable to this House? If he has a shred of the honour that right hon. and hon. Members are supposed to have, he would join the other Ridley and resign.

Another who should resign, but will not, is the Chancellor. Virtually everybody would agree that his last Budget was unfair—rewarding the rich and penalising the poor. However, at the time, many people including those wonderful youthful experts in the City described it as brilliant. They proclaimed the Chancellor "Man of the Year" and "Chancellor of the Century". A century is a long time in politics. Just last year the Chancellor was chosen as "Parliamentarian of the Year" by the *Spectator*. This year, I believe that he was not even invited to the lunch—*[Interruption.]* I had the pleasure of sitting next to the Chancellor's son and found him infinitely more charming than his father.

Last month's trade deficit of £2,400 million has been exceeded only twice in this country's history in a whole year. One of those years was last year, for which the Chancellor was also responsible. The only previous occasion was in 1974 as a result of the oil price increases and I shall return to the subject of oil in a minute.

Why is our balance of trade so bad? It is partly because, for electoral reasons, the Chancellor created the biggest credit boom in history. On top of that, his tax changes poured money into the pockets of the best-off and increased their spending power. What has happened to all that credit and all that extra disposable income in handbags and pockets? Most of it has been spent on buying houses and goods. The record amount of credit combined with the low number of houses being built has led to record house prices.

or.

The record amount of credit has also led to our shops being filled with goods from abroad. Why is that? The main answer is that a lot of the goods that people want to buy are not made in this country any more. That is because 2 million fewer people are now employed in manufacturing industry than when the Tories first came to office. There are now 2 million fewer people making things for others to wear or use. People ask why they cannot buy British any more. The answer is that the Government deliberately shut down large parts of British industry.

In Scotland, 200,000 fewer people are making things, and there are 150,000 fewer making things in the north. But it is not just there—500,000 manufacturing jobs in the midlands and another 500,000 here in the relatively prosperous south-east have gone.

Labour warned what would happen. We said that a country with a large population cannot get by without a prosperous manufacturing base. We said that Britain could not prosper just by selling one another hamburgers, insurance policies and pension schemes.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): No-tech.

Mr. Dobson: I have got that.

We said that the money spent had to be earned. We said that we should devote the one-off bonus of North sea oil to tooling up our industry and training our people. When we said that, we were laughed to scorn by people who should have known better, and by the Chancellor. In February 1984, he told the House that he was at a loss to understand the selective importance attached by Labour and, to be fair, by some Tories to the manufacturing sector. In Washington later that year, the Chancellor warned that the world should not

> "be seduced by the wonders of high-tech into overlooking the fact that many of the jobs of the future will be in labour-intensive service industries which are not so much low-tech as no-tech."

With iron resolve hitherto unknown outside a nunnery, his Cabinet colleagues joined him in resisting the seductions of high technology. Not for them the primrose path of dalliance with high-tech investment, high-quality training and high quality research. No, they left that to Japan, Korea and Taiwan.

During the period of this Government, our imports from Japan have risen by 267 per cent., imports from Korea have risen by 247 per cent., and imports from Taiwan have risen by no less than 362 per cent., to replace the goods that 2 million British workers used to make. The goods that we are importing are not no-tech.

Mr. Tebbit: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I shall not give way. The right hon. Gentleman can make a telephone call later. No doubt he will get it at a cheap rate from his employers.

Mr. Tebbit: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When an hon. Member makes an untrue assertion about the personal conduct of another hon. Member, that hon. Member is entitled to some redress. If the hon. Gentleman does not have the guts to allow me to intervene, he should at least have the guts to put things right when he says things that are untrue. The hon. Gentleman is gutless and he does not know what he is talking about.

Mr. Dobson: I am sorry. If British Telecom charges the right hon. Gentleman for his calls, he suffers as much as we do, no doubt.

Mr. Tebbit *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Is the right hon. Gentleman seeking to raise a point of order—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Tebbit: I cannot hear above the noise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) seeking to raise a point of order?

Mr. Tebbit: Yes, Sir. Is it in order for an hon. Member to make an assertion that there is an improper financial motive in the conduct of another hon. Member? That was the burden of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, and they were made because he did not have the guts to give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is contrary to our conventions for any right hon. or hon. Member to reflect adversely on the conduct, character or integrity of another hon. Member, but I did not hear any such remark.

Mr. Dobson: The goods that we are importing are not no-tech. Some are low-tech, but most are high-tech products produced on equipment more up-to-date than ours and by a work force increasingly better trained than

[Mr. Dobson]

ours. Those imports are the products of the deliberate policies of the Chancellor which he outlined so succinctly in Washington four years ago.

The next question that the Chancellor has to answer is: where would he be without North sea oil? If we discount oil exports from the trade figures of last month the deficit would be £2,800 million instead of the already record-breaking £2,400 million. If we make a proper comparison with the period before North sea oil and add our oil consumption for last month to our import total, the total trade deficit for last month would be £3,200 million. That would give a January to October trade deficit, not of £12,000 million but of £21,000 million and shows what a catastrophe the Government's policies have been for the non-oil economy.

To pay for this incompetence house buyers now face enormous increases in the costs of their mortgages. I heard that the Chancellor was "relaxed" about the impact of the interest rate increases on the cost of mortgages. Relaxed, is he? The real rate of interest, the difference between the inflation rate and interest rate, is now 6·5 per cent. If he is relaxed about that, he must have been delirious in 1965 when he obtained a famous mortgage. You may recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the right hon. Gentleman got a £20,000 council mortgage from Kensington and Chelsea at 6·5 per cent. The rate of inflation then was 3·9 per cent., giving a real interest of 2·6 per cent. No wonder he went to the Camden Palace last week to celebrate the 1960s. Most young couples would celebrate with him if they could get a mortgage at a real interest of 2·6 per cent. I note in passing from an article that he penned with his own fair hand for *The Spectator* at the time that he justified his borrowing from the public sector because

"the private sector is failing the nation."

Times have changed almost as much as the views of the Chancellor. In London last year, before things got half as bad as they are now, no less than 54 per cent. of would-be first-time buyers could not afford what the Association of District Councils called the cheapest common type of house. In Surrey the figure was 64 per cent., in Essex 56 per cent. and in Hertfordshire 49 per cent.

Is it fair to blame the Chancellor or the rest of the Cabinet for all this? We all know who takes the decisions —the Prime Minister. Nobody writing a book these days on British Government would come up with the idea that the Prime Minister is primus inter pares or, for the non-classical scholars opposite, first among equals. No, she got rid of the equals and got in the yes men, giving our language a new collective noun—a cringe of Cabinet Ministers. These days she does not communicate through the House. We have heard from her only 13 speeches in five and a half years. She feeds out information through a Mr. Bernard Ingham, the Official Deceiver. This extra-parliamentary functionary is no longer content to authorise leaks of confidential legal advice from the Law Officers of the Crown. Apparently he now has the authority of his mistress at 10 Downing street to embarrass the Queen, announcing off the record that the Queen would not be allowed to visit the Soviet Union. It is about time that the Prime Minister remembered that she swears an oath of allegiance to the Queen. It is not yet the other way round.

Before the right hon. Lady became Prime Minister and could use public officials for party purposes, the Tory party put out a press release in April 1979 giving her attitude to manufacturing industry. I hope that Conservative Members will listen to her pearls of wisdom. She said:

"We are going to do it by creating the conditions for real jobs, not artificial ones, so that once again the products stream from our factories and workshops while the customers of the world scramble over each other to buy them."

That was what she said when she was Leader of the Opposition. A likely trade deficit of more than £15,000 million suggests to me that few customers of the world are getting killed in the scramble to buy British. No wonder, with all the obstacles that her Government have put in the way of exporters—British exporters.

Much attention has been paid to the Prime Minister's trips abroad. Her favourite venue seems to be Washington. She is very popular there. It would be the grossest ingratitude on the part of the United States Government if she was not popular there. It is not just that she will go along with any aspect of American foreign policy as long as they promise her Trident. Like her, the American Government have a balance of trade problem. The Prime Minister has been very generous to President Reagan. She had done more to solve his trade problems than she has done to solve ours. During the period of her Government, United States exports to Britain have almost doubled. By those standards, she should be even more welcome in West Germany, whose exports to Britain have increased by 172 per cent., or in Italy and France, whose exports to us have more than doubled. There is a rumour that the Prime Minister will be offered the post of honorary president of the Japanese chamber of trade for services to exports—Japanese exports.

We are told that when the Prime Minister goes abroad she is batting for Britain—Mr. Bernard Ingham again, I believe. But a glance at the scoreboard shows that the bowling is usually too good for her. She may sneak a few export orders, but the people whom she meets end up exporting far more to us. To take Turkey as an example, the Prime Minister said that she visited that country to build bridges. Since she came to office, Turkey's exports to Britain have increased by 767 per cent. Other countries to benefit from such visits are China, at 187 per cent., Singapore at 155 per cent. and Hong Kong at 122 per cent. It appears from the figures that one visit from our Prime Minister and their goods come flooding into Britain. Under her Government, whatever else we have done, we have become brilliant at—how did she put it?— "scrambling over each other" to buy foreign people's goods.

All that was predictable, and it was predicted not just by the Labour party but in 1985 by the House of Lords Select Committee on Overseas Trade. It feared a current account deficit of £13,000 million a year by 1990. It said that the position was not self-correcting and would not come right on its own. It called for the manufacturing base to be enlarged, import penetration to be combated and manufacturing exports to be stimulated. Like us, the Committee was derided and ignored.

The Prime Minister ignored all that, preferring the seductive attractions of guards of honour mounted by foreign Heads of Government who know that Britain is becoming the export pushover of the world. They are happy to nod when she tells them that our economy is strong. But what else does she tell them about our country? More important, what does she leave out of all those speeches spattered with the royal "we"? I have not heard it reported that she has told any Heads of Government that within two miles of her official residence whole families of her fellow citizens made homeless by her housing policies live, eat, drink, wash and sleep in single, squalid, insanitary rooms in rundown bed-and-breakfast hotels. She does not tell them that those hotel children, who cannot sleep at night, cannot get exercise, cannot relax and cannot develop must attend schools where the Government have cut funds to help those children, and whose teachers are accused of incompetence and worse by her Secretary of State for Education and Science, who paid to make damn sure that his children did not share their classrooms with the children of the homeless.

It is not just that recent events have shown the shortsighted incompetence of the Government. They also show the Government's arrogant unconcern for the unemployed and the underpaid.

Recent events have also shown the eroding of ancient rights and liberties and the concentration of power in the hands of Government and, within the Government, the concentration of power in the hands of the Prime Minister. As far as I can see—and this is to the Prime Minister's credit—she displays little personal vanity, certainly less than many of her predecessors. But she is puffed up with political vanity. She has laid claim to credit for anything in our country that seemed worthwhile or that appeared to be doing well. There is no point in her pretending when things are going wrong that it is not her fault. The responsibility is hers. The Gracious Speech is hers. If put into practice it will hurt the weak, punish the caring and reward the rich and selfish. It truly epitomises all that the Prime Minister stands for. Both she and it are a national disgrace.

9.35 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I shall begin by reminding the House of the way in which this debate started last Tuesday with excellent speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) and for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples). It is not their fault if the debate did not always live up to the start that they gave to it. They both spoke with humour and insight about their constituencies. Their speeches will have enhanced the already high regard in which they are held in all parts of the House.

I should also like to mention the nearest thing that we had to a maiden speech in the debate, the retread speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars). His speech was characteristic and Conservative Members look forward to hearing from him again even if Labour Members are not so keen to do so.

Today's debate on the economy has been much heralded, but very little in the way of constructive alternative policies emerged from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. The right hon. Members for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) showed the whizz kids on the Opposition Front Bench what opposition should be about. They made constructive speeches, although I disagreed with most of what they said.

I intend to devote the second half of my speech to dealing with economic questions. As Leader of the House winding up this six-day debate, there are three things that I should like to mention first. The House may wish to reflect on the fact that we are completing what may be the last untelevised debate on the Loyal Address. The Select Committee on the Televising of Proceedings of the House is making progress as fast as it reasonably can, but the House will appreciate that there are complex issues with wide-ranging implications to be addressed. In this context, I note the report from the Procedure Committee on the implications for procedure of televising the House. That report will, no doubt, be relevant to tomorrow's debate, but I shall just say that I am sure that the Committee is right not to suggest any premature changes, and that any changes that may be made should be for the convenience of the House rather than the convenience of the broadcasters.

Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) raised the question of the organisation and functions of Select Committees as a result of the splitting of the old DHSS into the Department of Health and the Department of Social Security, and the increasing effect of Europe on the work of our Select Committees. I agree with my right hon. Friend's logic about the split into two Select Committees—one to deal with health and one to deal with social security. We have to consider the timing of such a change, and that needs to be discussed.

My right hon. Friend was right to raise the issue of the best way to deal with European questions, but that is something that I should like to discuss with him, as Chairman of the Liaison Committee, after I have heard the views of the House in tomorrow's procedure debate.

I must now say something about the forthcoming legislative programme in this Session, which will occupy most of our time until next summer. The programme for this Session is deliberately a balanced one. It contains measures and policies covering four areas of concern both to the House and to the general public. The first theme is that of continued economic progress through the pursuit of policies to control inflation, foster enterprise and promote employment. In that connection, I would mention the Bills relating to the employment of women and young people and to training, the Social Security Bill, the Bill relating to company law and the law on mergers. Above all, there are three privatisation measures.

Secondly, there are measures that concern the application of the criminal law to maintain security and order while protecting individual liberty. In that context, let me mention our plans to replace section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 with provisions which prohibit only those disclosures of information that would be harmful to the public interest. It is a civil liberties measure which greatly limits the present scope of the criminal law and is also—and unashamedly—a measure which protects the vital interests of a democratic Government in a free society.

There are also measures relating to terrorism: the replacement with permanent arrangements of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act, which has saved so many lives and which—to its shame—the Labour party has consistently refused to support. I draw the House's attention, in particular, to the provisions aimed at intercepting the flow of funds to terrorist organisations. The courts will have the power to order forfeiture of money or property. Similar provisions have been applied to the funds of drug traffickers and—in the Criminal Justice Act—to the loot from other crimes. The level of remission for terrorist offences is also being reduced. We are introducing other measures, too, relating

[Mr. John Wakeham]

to Northern Ireland to secure fair employment there and to require from local government candidates declarations against terrorism.

Another important measure is designed to deal with football hooligans. We are proposing a national membership scheme of clubs to control admission to football matches. The scheme will deter troublemakers, both inside and outside the grounds. That will release police manpower and effort to deal with other offences.

The third theme of our proposals is the care of those in need. That applies particularly to the protection of children and the rights of parents. The present child care law both inadequately safeguards the welfare of children at risk and is unfair to parents. The widespread concern at the handling of the Cleveland child abuse cases, shared on both sides of the House, should make these proposals particularly welcome. My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor has also issued a consultation document on the proposal for an office of child protection to be established within the courts system.

This Session will also see decisions announced following the Government's Health Service review.

The final theme is the continuation of our policies for progress on arms control achieved from a position of strength and for continued good relations with both the super powers. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has already met President-elect Bush and reaffirmed our strong commitment to NATO and our American partners. Relations with the Soviet Union will, we hope, be further enhanced by the visit of Mr. Gorbachev.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Which of her two personalities will the Prime Minister adopt when President Gorbachev comes here? Will she be the person who says, "We can do business with this man" or will she show the other side of her personality when she starts making up fanciful and ridiculous demands—for example, when, as the Queen's minder, she is liable to say that the Queen cannot go to Moscow unless President Gorbachev reinstates a Cossack regiment in the Red Army? Is she going to be Mrs. Nice or Mrs. Nasty?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend will do what she has done all the while she has been Prime Minister. She will negotiate on behalf of Britain and will produce for this country the best agreements available which will be substantially better than anything that the Labour party could dream of producing.

I turn now to the three privatisation measures in this Session's programme. The House well knows that privatisation is a key element in our economic strategy. Industry operates better if it is freed from political interference and is subject to the competitive pressures of the market. Eighteen major companies have now been privatised. Almost 40 per cent. of the state sector that we inherited has been returned to private ownership.

In 1979, state-owned industries accounted for 11·5 per cent. of Britain's GDP and employed some 7 per cent. of the total work force. Many of those industries were grossly inefficient and losing vast sums of taxpayers' money. In 1979, the nationalised industries were costing taxpayers £4·5 billion a year at today's prices.

Since privatisation, industries which drained the public purse are now filling it by making large contributions to the Exchequer through taxation. British Telecom, for example, is now contributing far more to the Government through corporation tax than it ever did when it was state-run. Since 1979, the Exchequer has benefited by more than £22 billion from privatisation.

However, the case for privatisation is emphatically not about raising money but about making industry work better. The balance of reasons may be different for complete or near monopolies from what it is for businesses which operate in a free market. That applies to the three industries mentioned in the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): If, among a list of past and projected privatisation issues, Jaguar is still considered the paradigm by the Government, will the right hon. Gentleman explain the benefits of private ownership which have now led to 1,200 workers at that company being declared surplus to requirements in the next two and a half years and, in a six-week period before Christmas last year, to 17 shop-floor workers at Jaguar dying of strokes and stress-induced illnesses because of the speed-ups of the track? Where are the benefits of privatisation in car industries such as Jaguar?

Mr. Wakeham: One of the major problems of British industry over many years has been the car industry, but, since privatisation, Jaguar has at least shown a lead on how a car company can operate in this country, and it should have the full support of all hon. Members.

The Scottish Bus Group should never have been publicly owned to begin with. The 10 private companies that will be formed from the Scottish Bus Group will improve still further the competition which has already come from deregulation.

The case for privatising the water industry is different. It is not mainly based on competition, as the water authorities are natural monopolies. Instead, the case for privatisation is based on the need to free the industry from political control. The water industry has a turnover of £3 billion a year. There is no reason for this huge undertaking to be Government owned. Above all, the industry should be able to make its own decisions and set its own priorities as regards investment and borrowing. Privatisation will allow it to do so.

The Water Bill is not just about privatisation. It is also a major environmental measure. Privatisation of natural monopolies can be combined with tough regulation to protect consumers and improve the quality of life.

Mr. Beith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wakeham: I have given way rather more than Opposition Front-Bench Members did and I ought to get on.

The Bill to privatise the electricity supply industry will bring about the largest privatisation ever. The principles behind the Government's proposals were set out by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy in February and are contained in the White Paper. The case for privatising electricity is based fundamentally on the arguments for competition. The distribution and transmission of electricity are largely natural monopolies, but there is no such monopoly in electricity generation. And so the CEGB, under our proposals, will be split into two competing generating companies.

All three privatisations will make the industries work better. All three—but especially those of the water and electricity industries—will spread share ownership, the wider ownership of property, shares, pensions and savings. In short, the creation of a property-owning and capital-owning democracy is not merely an economic but a social policy of immense benefit to the British people.

Most of the debate today has been focused on the economy. Since the beginning of the previous Session, Britain's dynamic economy has produced more jobs—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may not like this, but they will get it. It has produced more jobs, more investment and more growth. Prudent financial policies have allowed us to cut tax rates, repay debt and increase spending on priority programmes.

The Opposition parties spend a great deal of time talking about inflation and the balance of payments deficit. So let me deal with those issues.

Mr. Kinnock: Do.

Mr. Wakeham: Yes. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will listen.

Inflation has risen and we need to reduce it. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has raised interest rates to do just that. It should fall again in the fourth quarter of next year. Let there be no doubt that the control of inflation remains the Government's top priority. That is why we have brought it down to less than one quarter of the peak that it reached under the irresponsible policies of the Labour Government. That is why, even though it is still too high, it is lower now than at any time during the term of the Labour Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) was right to bring some balance into our discussions. Unlike the Labour party, the Conservative party carries credibility when it pledges lower inflation. In 1985, inflation rose a little and we took swift action. It touched 7 per cent. before falling back to just over 2 per cent. We tackled inflationary pressures then and we shall tackle them now with the same instrument—interest rates. We stuck to our policies then and we shall stick to them now. They are policies that have brought success that the Labour party can only envy.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and others have called for what might be referred to as the golf club solution. That is for some instruments to be used, as well as interest rates, to slow down the economy and to reduce inflation. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear on several occasions, no such instruments exist. Credit controls, for instance, would create inefficiencies and distortions in the market while acting as a disincentive to borrowers and savers alike. They did not work properly even in the 1970s, when we had a battery of restrictions to back them up, and they would be still less effective today. To the extent that they did work, they would be unfair. Respectable lenders would charge cheaper credit to the safest borrowers while less well-placed borrowers would have to pay more, and would be driven to the loan sharks.

Some hon. Members have suggested the use of fiscal policy. The proper role of that policy is to create a stable medium-term framework for business. It is not a short-term measure to fight inflation. During the 1960s and 1970s Governments tried to use fiscal policy for short-term demand management, and the lesson to be drawn from the failures of that period is clear. Moreover, fiscal policy is already tight. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor budgets for a surplus £3·25 billion and that is now expected to turn out at some £10 billion.

I reiterate what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has said. The control of inflation is a job for monetary policy, which means interest rates. Eighty per cent. of all household borrowing is on mortgages and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) was right: credit cards represent only 5 per cent. of total credit. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) was also correct to state that many people, including himself, do not pay interest on their credit cards because they pay on time. I agree with that view.

We are told that the balance of payments deficit is too big. Again, that is rich coming from the Labour party. Labour Governments usually had deficits which rocked the markets. Furthermore, their trade deficits were fuelled by a huge budget deficit which reached 9·25 per cent. of GDP. There could not be a bigger contrast now. Public finances are stronger now than at any time in living memory.

The standard of living of our people has continued to rise. The real take-home pay of the average family with two children has risen by well over a quarter since we took office. A similar family on half-average income has seen it rise by 23 per cent.

Those are the facts, and the achievements reflect the sound economic policies which we shall continue. Ten years of hard work have brought those rewards. The last five years have seen some of the most astonishing successes and achievements for the British economy in living memory, but it has not been easy.

We have faced a miners' strike aimed at nothing less than the overthrow of the elected Government. We have also seen the turbulence in the world's currency markets, with first a surge and then a collapse in the dollar. Only a year ago we faced a spectacular stock market crash which many thought was the prelude to a return to the depression of the 1930s.

None the less, the past five years have brought record increases in productivity; record falls in the level of unemployment; record growth; record levels of investment; and record increases in living standards. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer passes his 2,000th day in office this week, he is the longest serving post-war Chancellor. He has a brilliant record of achievement which few Chancellors could match and which no Labour Chancellor could more than dream about.

The measures this Session will carry forward our radical programme for change. They will improve our economic performance and widen ownership. They will protect the environment and improve the quality of life. They will be underpinned by a vibrant, strong, sound economy which will pay for pensions and benefits and a more efficient Health Service. There are measures to combat violence, particularly the scourge of terrorism.

That is a programme which bears the mark of a Government who retain the confidence of the people and the respect of our neighbours. It is a businesslike programme for a Government who mean business and are know to do so, and as such I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 247, Noes 352.

Division No. 3] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek

Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
John, Brynmor
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert

McNamara, Kevin
McTaggart, Bob
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey

Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas

Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda

Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Newbert and
Mr. Alan Howarth.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 32 (Calling of amendments at end of debate), at the end of the Question to add:

"But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech did not contain any proposal to combat the environmental crisis; call on the Government to take immediate action to join the 30 per cent. club, control the transport and disposal of hazardous wastes, develop a coherent planning strategy to protect green field sites, promote the use of unleaded petrol and improve energy efficiency; further regret the absence from the Gracious Speech of any measures to tackle rising homelessness and poverty or measures to correct the mistakes of the March budget which are leading to rising inflation and a record payments deficit; believe that the Government's negative aproach to European co-operation is damaging the United Kingdom's best interests; further believe that measures outlined in the Gracious Speech for the privatisation of the water and electricity industries will lead to lower environmental standards, inadequate competition and higher prices for the consumer; further call for a Government sponsored Charter of Rights for the consumer in the market place; regret the absence from the Gracious Speech of a Freedom of Information Bill; and call for a programme of constitutional and electoral reform, including Parliaments for the nations of Scotland and Wales, which would protect the liberties of the citizen in the face of further restrictions proposed in the Gracious Speech."—*[Mr. Wallace.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 24, Noes 356.

Division No. 4] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Fearn, Ronald
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kennedy, Charles
Livsey, Richard
Maclennan, Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Salmond, Alex
Steel, Rt Hon David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brittan, Rt Hon Leon
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Miss Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Gower, Sir Raymond
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*

Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Michael Neubert and
Mr. Alan Howarth.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

To be presented by Privy Councillors or Members of Her Majesty's Household.

PETITIONS

Settle-Carlisle Railway

10.29 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): More than 2,000 of my —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Will hon. Members wishing to leave the Chamber please do so quietly?

Mrs. Mahon: More than 2,000 of my constituents have asked me to present a petition to save the beautiful and historic Settle-Carlisle railway. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is an important petition but I cannot hear it. Could you please ask hon. Members to leave quietly or to listen to the petition?

Mr. Speaker: I have already made that request, but I will make it again. Will hon. Members please leave the Chamber quietly?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Let my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) speak with sophistication.

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry about that.

Mrs. Mahon: This petition has been presented to me by over 2,000 of my constituents to try to bring pressure to bear on the Government to save this historic and beautiful line.

Many people who live in the area value it as an essential transport system and many people wishing to visit the area use it as an amenity. For people travelling between the midlands, Yorkshire and Scotland, it is an excellent line both for communications and for historic beauty.

Therefore, I present this petition gladly on behalf of my constituents in the hope that it will do some good. It contains 2,000 names, and I understand that some 8,000 names will be presented this week.

To lie upon the Table.

10.31 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I wish to present a similar petition on behalf of Mrs. Patricia Ashton, Mr. John Ashton and over 2,000 people living in the Dewsbury area of west Yorkshire who are concerned about the future of the Settle-Carlisle railway line. They believe that the railway line should have a future, not only as a tourist attraction and not only because it opens up an important and beautiful area of the country but because it should also form an essential part of this country's rail network and could have a use as an important freight line if British Rail were to exploit its full potential.

Many people in the north of England understand the full significance of the line—its historic significance, its engineering significance, and the way in which it opens up beautiful parts of the north of England to serve the many people who can appreciate its beauty.

We believe that British Rail has not taken the line seriously. Contrary to the views of Conservative Members who do not seem interested in this matter, we believe that this is an important issue. It is a significant achievement that over 2,000 people in my constituency and, I understand, over 80,000 people in all have signed petitions

[Mrs. Ann Taylor]

about the future of the Settle-Carlisle railway. I hope that those who are seriously concerned about the future of railways in this country, and in particular about the future of this Settle-Carlisle line, will urge the Government to reconsider their position on this matter. This line has great significance to the whole of the north of England and to this country's railway network.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping to present a petition tonight but do not know whether it appears on your list.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, it is on my sheet.

10.33 pm

Mr. Jopling: I too wish to present a petition in support of the Settle-Carlisle railway line. However, unlike the hon. Members for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), the Settle-Carlisle railway line passes through my constituency and is a matter of great importance to many of my constituents. This petition has been signed by about 3,000 people, many of whom are constituents of mine.

I have expressed my views on this line previously in the House. Indeed, I expressed them a few months ago when the disappointing announcement was made that the line had to pass out of British Rail's hands. I hope that it will be possible to find a way to keep the line open in the future. It is a famous line which has justifiably received a great deal of publicity. Its features have become widely known and understood.

The petition is in the name of Mrs. Rosalind Templeman of 7 Railway Cottages, Garsdale, Sedbergh, Cumbria. I have great pleasure in presenting it to the House.

To lie upon the Table.

10.34 pm

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): I also have the honour to present a petition regarding the Settle to Carlisle railway and the associated Blackburn to Hellifield branch line. It contains approximately 2,050 signatures, and states that the

petitioners pray that the Settle-Carlisle railway and the associated Blackburn to Hellifield railway will be retained as an integral part of the national railway network.

To lie upon the Table.

Wakefield (European Regional Funds)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

10.35 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I am grateful for the opportunity of initiating this Adjournment debate. The Minister and his predecessors will be aware that, for many years, representations have been made by members of the Wakefield metropolitan district council and, in particular, by representatives of the Castleford area, but we have not yet been able to persuade the Government to give the district any aid or to include it in the zone for assisted area status.

The case that I put tonight is supported by my hon. Friends the Members for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and for Hemsworth (Mr. Buckley), who are present.

I am pleased to have the opportunity of raising the issue tonight. It may seem to some hon. Members to be a small, parochial issue. However, behind Wakefield district's elegibility for European regional funds lies the economic regeneration of an area that has been devastated by the decline of the coal industry.

The district has had no support or assistance from the Government. The Government took away the area's intermediate area status. It has had no support from the urban programme, yet today the problems of the district are far worse than those of many assisted areas. I do not intend to take up my time with a bad-news story. Instead, I ask the Minister for good news about reviving the Wakefield economy.

Pontefract and Castleford is one of four constituencies in the Wakefield metropolitan district. My hon. Friends will join me in congratulating the district council on its hard work in developing a programme for revitalising the local economy. The programme is summarised in a brochure entitled "Ideas for Action". The Minister has seen a copy of it. I am pleased to see that he has a copy of it.

The ideas for action programme was developed in conjunction with the local business community and has created a partnership between the council and the private sector. The partnership approach has been adopted in implementing the programme. I hope that the Minister has read the summary of the ideas for action programme. He will know that it involves the investment of about £88 million to provide the infrastructure needed to trigger further investment by the private sector. If the Minister has not read the document, he should do so. It makes an unanswerable case. I should like the Minister to acknowledge, either by nodding his head or otherwise, to acknowledge whether he has read it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry (Mr. Robert Atkins): I have read parts of it.

Mr. Lofthouse: I recommend that the Minister reads the rest of it. I am sure that then he will be convinced that our argument cannot be disputed.

To meet the costs of the ideas for action programme, the district council and the business community approached the Government and the European Commission. It is hoped that the district will be recognised as an objective 2 area under the new rules for the European regional fund.

In May of this year, a delegation from Wakefield met both the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment and officials from other Departments. The district was represented by the chamber of commerce, local employers, industrialists and district councillors. Both the council leader and Conservative group leader were on that delegation.

In July, in reply to a debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry stated:

> "It is possible that Wakefield might be eligible for assistance from the European regional development fund, which is currently being restructured . . . I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will keep the interests of Wakefield closely in mind during the negotiations."—[*Official Report*, 28 July 1988; Vol 138, c. 660.]

That was good news. I understand that the Government have submitted to Brussels a list of areas which they wish to be recognised under objective 2 and that Wakefield is on that list. I am grateful that at last the Government have acknowledged the strength of Wakefield's case. However, it is possible that the European Commission will not agree to the whole of the British list, so some areas may fall off. Can the Minister tell me how the list has been ranked and how near the top or bottom of the list Wakefield metropolitan district is?

In a letter on 14 November to Mr. P. G. Thompson, honorary secretary of the Yorkshire and Humberside regional association, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State referred to the selection of objective 2 areas in west Yorkshire, south Yorkshire and Humberside, and said:

> "We hope that all the assisted areas in these counties will be selected; some non-assisted ones too."

Can the Minister tell me whether the Government are giving priority to the selection of assisted areas over non-assisted areas?

The Wakefield metropolitan district lacks assisted area status and does not have support from the urban programme. There is a danger that the European Commission may accept only assisted areas under objective 2. Can the Minister reassure me that the European Commission has stated positively that non-assisted areas can be selected under objective 2?

The European regional development fund provides finance for two main types of measure: infrastructure and investment subsidies. Investment subsidies operate only in assisted areas. Is the Commission happy to see objective 2 areas which can use only the infrastructure part, not the investment subsidy part? Have the Government explored that issue with the Commission? If not, why submit non-assisted areas which the Commission will have to refuse?

I am aware that assisted area status is not included in the criteria laid down in the new regulations for selecting objective 2 areas. At one stage it was suggested, but dropped after some countries objected. Article 9 of the Council regulation EEC 2052/88 states:

> "In establishing the list . . . the Commission shall seek to ensure that assistance is genuinely concentrated on the areas most seriously affected at the most appropriate geographical level, taking into account the particular situation of the area concerned."

The letter that I quoted earlier makes it clear that the most seriously affected parts of west Yorkshire will be selected. By any honest criterion that must mean Wakefield metropolitan district.

West Yorkshire is covered by seven travel-to-work areas. Over the past three years Castleford and Pontefract

[Mr. Lofthouse]

have suffered from the highest unemployment rate with Wakefield and Dewsbury in second place. Wakefield metropolitan district has suffered from the sharpest industrial decline. Only four years ago, coal mining was the largest single industry in the district. Some 15,000 miners worked at 16 pits. Today 4,000 miners work at five pits, one of which is already earmarked for closure. Mine closures have a knock-on effect on the engineering and service sectors. Since the beginning of the year, there have been almost 1,400 notified redundancies in the district, 327 of which have been in mining engineering or mining-related firms. There have been major redundancies in British Jeffrey Diamond, Fletcher Sutcliffe and Wild and in Thyssen. The food and drink sector has also been badly hit, with 673 notified redundancies in food and drink firms.

The loss of 12,000 miners' wage packets has taken millions of pounds out of the local economy. The figure that I have been given shows that in Castleford £104 million a year has been taken out of earning capacity. During the past four years, £460 million has been taken from the earning capacity of miners working for British Coal. Very few jobs have been created in their place.

Unemployment takes its toll in other ways. People's health declines when they are without work. A recent report in the journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners shows that jobless people are twice as likely to go to hospital. Unemployment causes strains on families and in communities. In pit towns where the pit has closed young single people are moving out, leaving behind the old and those with young children. The latest unemployment figures for Castleford travel-to-work area show that 42 per cent. of unemployed people are aged under 24.

Wakefield metropolitan district is the most seriously affected part of west Yorkshire. I hope that the Minister will confirm that. His colleagues in the Department said in a written answer on 25 November that Wakefield was one of the worst areas. I suggest that it is the worst.

Unemployment is much higher in Wakefield than in many assisted areas. The latest figures show that only three intermediate areas in England have higher unemployment than Pontefract and Castleford. In England as a whole, 21 intermediate areas have lower unemployment than Pontefract and Castleford, and 13 have lower unemployment than Wakefield and Dewsbury. The Minister's answer to another written question on 25 November shows that the position is even worse, with a total of 41 areas having unemployment lower than that in Pontefract and Castleford. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), knows all about that. The intermediate area with the lowest unemployment is Accrington and Rossendale. The other constituency in Accrington and Rossendale is Hyndburn, which is a marginal Tory seat. I say nothing more about that.

Selecting only assisted areas is clearly incompatible with the regulation, which demands the selection of areas most seriously affected. Much effort has gone into restructuring the European funds. It would be embarrassing for all concerned if an area such as Wakefield was not included while other areas with lesser problems were included. Wakefield metropolitan district is ready to use the funds. Its council and business community have the plans and the desire to reconstruct the local economy. Its case for recognition is unanswerable. I hope that the Minister has good news for us on the attitude of the Government and the European Commission to Wakefield's case.

Wakefield is not sitting back and not helping itself. The district council and West Yorkshire passenger transport authority are working to reopen the Pontefract-Wakefield railway line for passenger services. The proposal includes the building of new railway stations at Pontefract, Featherstone, Streethouse, Sharlston and Crofton. That will enable people from those areas of high unemployment to commute to larger cities such as Leeds and Sheffield.

I have already given the Minister notice of my questions to him tonight. I shall repeat them as briefly as possible. It is possible that the European Commission will not agree to the whole British list, so some areas may be taken off. Can the Minister tell me how the list has been ranked and how near to the top or bottom of the list is the Wakefield metropolitan district?

In a letter to Mr. P. G. Thompson, honorary secretary of Yorkshire and Humberside regional association on 14 November, the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry spoke about the selection of objective 2 areas in west Yorkshire, south Yorkshire and Humberside. He said:

> "We hope that all the assisted areas in these counties will be selected: some non-assisted ones too."

Does that imply that the Government are giving priority to the selection of assisted areas over non-assisted areas? Can the Minister assure me that the Commission has positively said that non-assisted areas can be selected under objective 2? Is the Commission happy to see objective 2 areas that can use only the infrastructure part but not the investment subsidies part of the European regional development fund?

Have the Government explored this issue with the Commission? If they have not, why submit non-assisted areas which the Commission will have to refuse? Can the Minister confirm that Wakefield metropolitan district is the most seriously affected part of west Yorkshire? I should be grateful to the Minister for answers to those questions.

10.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Robert Atkins): It is a measure of the respect in which the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) is held in the House that he has been able to encourage his hon. Friends to support him in a debate about his constituency and the immediately surrounding area. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on being able to talk about his constituency in the way that he has.

As I expected of the hon. Gentleman, he has also been courteous enough to talk to the people in my office this morning and to tell them and me of the questions that he wished to raise. I shall endeavour to cover all the points that the hon. Gentleman has raised, but if I miss any of them, or if we run out of time, I shall be more than happy to write to the hon. Gentleman and take-up the points that may be missed.

I have been approached by representatives of Wakefield, not only from the majority side—which is quite substantial—but also by Conservative councillors and their supporters. That is a measure of the support across the party divide for the case that the hon. Gentleman has presented.

I am glad to take this opportunity to recognise Wakefield's interest in the European regional development fund and to explain in more general terms how things stand on eligibility for the fund and what we hope to obtain from it in future. Even though Wakefield district has not in recent years been an assisted area, the north-western part of it has already benefited from the regional fund. The fund has been supporting the business improvement services scheme for small firms in the west Yorkshire textile closure area, which includes most of Ossett and parts of Dewsbury.

I am well aware of the vigour and diligence with which the district council has pursued the case for future regional fund eligibility for the whole area. I shall come to that in a moment. The hon. Gentleman spoke about the document that he waved about. I have read most, if not all, of that. I congratulate his constituents and the council, as one or two European Commissioners have done, on the quality of the document. Its authors have not made the mistake of knocking their area which, I think the hon. Gentleman would agree, is not necessarily helpful to the future of such areas. They have intelligently and carefully highlighted the problems as they perceive them. Despite the colour of the document, it is extremely ably put together.

Wakefield is showing a welcome adaption to change. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that more needs to be done, and I hope that the European regional fund will be able to help. As he knows, there is to be a new regime for all the European Community structural funds and new criteria for eligibility under them. The Single European Act calls for the amending of the rules of the funds, including the regional fund, so as to strengthen the Community's economic and social cohesion and to address its principal regional imbalances. The funds are to be doubled by 1993 for this purpose.

The bulk of the funds will go to the less developed regions that are to be found in the southern part of the Community. The framework regulation for the reformed funds which was adopted in June contains five objectives for their use. The precise point at issue tonight is how much of Britain, and of west Yorkshire, the European Commission will select as qualifying for the fund's new objective 2.

Objective 2 will, from the beginning of 1989, confer eligibility for the European regional development fund and a certain priority for the European social fund. At present, European regional development fund eligibility essentially depends on assisted area status, so Wakefield has not been eligible recently, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said—except for the special BIS measures that I mentioned. In future, there will be no necessary exact correspondence between the assisted areas and those eligible for the fund. I know that there has been some confusion about aspects of this eligibility, so it is worth while spelling out the situation.

An early draft of the structured fund's framework regulation proposed that objective 2 support should be confined to nationally aided areas, but the Commission later withdrew this proposal and the final regulation does not include it. The hon. Gentleman has done his homework, and is perfectly well aware of that. It does not mention nationally aided areas at all. It was the will of the Council that that should not be so, and the British Government's recommendations for the objective 2 list was based on this clear understanding.

Therefore, I am disturbed to hear from Brussels that there should be some suggestion that the Commission may, after all, decide to exclude all areas that are not nationally aided areas. By overturning the previous clear understanding, this would be wasting our own representations, the hon. Member's and those of all others concerned with the inclusion of areas like Wakefield. We are making urgent attempts to clarify that, although I have every expectation what was originally intended will be the case.

As the hon. Gentleman has pointed out, objective 2 is of major importance to the United Kingdom. It calls for the conversion of the regions, including inner city communities, that are seriously affected by industrial decline, and the Government have made it clear in Brussels that we expect continuing recognition of the needs of those of our regions that have still not overcome the problems of conversion away from some, mainly traditional, manufacturing industries. We continue to need that regional fund.

We accordingly secured criteria for objective 2 that would pick out those regions and areas where industrial activity has been strongly based, although declining, and where unemployent is above the Community average. The outcome, incorporated in the framework regulation, is three criteria that are applied at county level, and three others to apply to adjacent areas, inner cities, and other industrial areas. The regulation goes on to say that assistance in the counties that qualify as counties is to be concentrated on the most seriously affected parts of them.

The hon. Gentleman has raised three questions, and I shall deal with them as he raised them with me. He asked about the ranking of Wakefield metropolitan district. As far as we are aware, there is no ranking. If the Commission should say that among our suggestions some are eligible and some are not, we would want to know the basis for that decision and would consider our further response. As of today, there is no ranking.

The second question was about the letter I wrote to Mr. P. Thompson, the honorary secretary of the Yorkshire and Humberside regional association.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I am intrigued about the question of ranking. How does the Commission describe the first, second and third, up to the 10th or whatever? Where is the cut-off point, and how does it arrive at that if there is no ranking?

Mr. Atkins: We have no sign as to what that ranking may be. Clearly, when the matter eventually comes out, when the decisions are finally taken, they may establish the criteria on which it has ranked. As from now, there is no ranking, and no suggestion of ranking and there is no ranking in the submissions that we have made. We have put in all the assisted areas that we could find of which there are others like Wakefield. There is no ranking as far as we are concerned, and as of now there is no ranking as far as the Commission is concerned. We await developments, and, as the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will know, the mills of the Commission grind exceedingly slow, and until it produces something we shall not be able to make a judgment.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Bearing in mind the confusion about this issue of assisted area status in relation to objective 2 and Wakefield's strong case for assistance

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

under that objective, would it not be simpler for the Government to accord Wakefield assisted area status now, given that there are many areas in this country with far better employment figures than Wakefield has at present?

Mr. Atkins: Bearing in mind that time is limited, I do not want to get drawn into a regional discussion, but we have always made it clear that we do not want to change immediately the assisted areas map, which took four or five years to establish and culminated in the decisions of 1984, largely because of the requirement for stability and planning in the future. We have said that we will not review that map this side of a general election, although some areas come up and others go down. When that review takes place, we shall then have to make a rejudgment on the basis of those submissions.

As it stands at the moment, Wakefield is not an assisted area and will not be so within the foreseeable future. However, we are pushing with the Commission the case put so eloquently by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford.

In my letter to Mr. Thompson of the Yorkshire and Humberside regional association, I said:

> "We hope that all Assisted Areas in these counties will be selected; some non-Assisted ones may too."

Every possible assisted area is being included. The hon. Gentleman asked me whether I could assure him that the Commission has stated positively that the non-assisted areas can be selected under objective 2. We are exploring that point further and we shall endeavour to let him know as soon as we know exactly what the position is.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me whether I could confirm whether Wakefield is the most seriously affected part of west Yorkshire. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs said earlier, it is one of the most important areas, but, as the hon. Gentleman will know, there are others, including Bradford city urban programme area, Kirklees borough urban programme area and Leeds city urban programme area, which go side by side with Wakefield in our suggestions to the Commission. Although Wakefield's case is important, there are other cases of concern which Opposition Members who represent nearby constituencies will understand also have merit.

We are endeavouring to push the case wherever we can for the Commission to consider what assistance it may give under any of the objectives, but, in this context, under objective 2. In those circumstances, we hope—we cannot predict the results at this stage—that the hon. Gentleman will find acceptable the results that we obtain.

Mr. Lofthouse: Will the Minister assure us that, after the investigation, when the Commission finally reaches its conclusions, the Government will push Wakefield's case?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman is quite rightly pushing the case for his area, and that is understandable. I would do exactly the same in his circumstances. I am faced with the prospect of having to deal with a wide variety of submissions from all over the country, all of which are argued to have equal merit. I shall do my best to ensure that Wakefield gets a fair crack of the whip, largely because it has a case to make in view of the document to which I have referred and in view of the hon. Gentleman's comments. That case will be put as strongly as possible. However, as the hon. Gentleman is a fair man, he will realise that there are other areas represented by both his hon. Friends and my hon. Friends which also reckon that they have a pretty good case to put.

Mr. Lofthouse: Especially west Yorkshire.

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman makes his point. He understands the situation as well as anyone. In the circumstances, I can assure him that we will press the case for Wakefield. He is pushing against an open door in that respect, but we must balance the relative importance of all the areas concerned.

Time is running out. There may well be other aspects of this matter with which I have not dealt. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand that. If he wishes to come back to me, perhaps in correspondence, I will be more than happy to pursue the matter. I reiterate that Wakefield has a case and that we will continue to pursue it. I hope that the results will be to the satisfaction of the House and of the hon. Gentleman.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 30 November 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chemical Weapons

1. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to his Iraqi counterpart on the use of chemical weapons against its Kurdish population.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): We have repeatedly condemned Iraq for its use of chemical weapons. I made that absolutely clear to the Iraqi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs on 21 September, as did my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster at the highest level in Baghdad earlier this month. We noted with concern last week's television documentary containing further reports of Iraqi CW use in August. It underlines the importance of the international conference to be held in Paris in January to reaffirm the authority of the 1925 Geneva protocol banning CW use.

Mr. Atkinson: As it is now clear that Iraq has perpetrated the most appalling atrocities on its Kurdish population by using poisonous gas, does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that to seek better relations with Iraq at this time is to send a mixed message, namely, that Iraq can get away with genocide in violation of the Geneva protocol to which it is a party? Will my right hon. and learned Friend raise the matter with our European colleagues at the forthcoming Rhodes conference?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have certainly been appalled by the suffering inflicted as a result of the large-scale displacement of Kurds from their homes in Iraq. We have proclaimed the evidence of CW use as compelling but not conclusive. It is clear that Iraq has a case to answer, and we have been in the forefront of pressing that case in respect of those barbaric weapons. We want a total ban—that is the importance of the Paris conference.

As to the second part of my hon. Friend's question, there is no way that the Iraqis could have misunderstood the firmness of our position on chemical weapons. As I said, it was underlined by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he was in Iraq a short time ago.

In such a situation, one can do one of two things. One can isolate Iraq and make its unacceptable behaviour more likely, or one can try to establish and maintain a working relationship, to make clear our very strong views on that aspect of Iraq's behaviour. This matter is one of constant concern. Last week I told the House that it will be permanently on the international agenda, so it may be discussed in one form or another at the Rhodes summit.

Mrs. Clwyd: Why does the Foreign Secretary not follow the lead of the United States Congress, which, when it reconvenes in January, will impose economic sanctions against Iraq? Why will the British Government not do the same? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not see any inconsistency between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office condemning violations of human rights in Iraq, and the Department of Trade and Industry stitching up massive trade agreements with that country without once mentioning the subject of human rights?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: In the last part of her question the hon. Lady misses the central point of my main answer. During the course of my right hon. Friend's visit to Baghdad he took the opportunity to emphasise how strongly we feel about the use of chemical weapons and the importance that we attach to the matter. The hon. Lady is wrong to believe that the United States Congress has passed sanctions legislation. It has not done so. The American Administration are opposed to sanctions, and we believe that that is entirely consistent. It is not likely that any effective consequence will follow from the unilateral imposition of economic sanctions in this case. It would not prevent the use of chemical weapons by Iraq. We shall continue pressing the case as vigorously and energetically as we have done already, being in the forefront of those pressing it, we shall continue in that fashion.

Mr. Bowis: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, apart from a stop to this hideous practice, what the Kurdish people need most is humanitarian aid from the world community? Will he make a commitment on behalf of Her Majesty's Government that that will be forthcoming as a matter of urgency?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The exodus that has taken place has created a major humanitarian problem. We have already contributed some £250,000 for humanitarian assistance, and we have told the Turkish authorities that we are prepared to consider applications for an extension of that in the ordinary way.

Mr. Robertson: The Foreign Secretary says that evidence of Iraq's use of chemical weapons is "compelling but not conclusive"— a grand new phrase to hide the Government's increasingly fudging position. Did he see the programme on Channel 4 last Wednesday night, which brought forward conclusive proof both of the slaughter of the Kurds in northern Iraq and of the use of deadly poisons in those attacks?

Surely there is something indecent in the sight of the Foreign Office condemning the use of chemical weapons, followed by that of a Cabinet Minister going to Baghdad touting for trade and business and doubling trade credits to Iraq, without any linked condition that Iraq desist from the vile slaughter of so many people in the northern provinces.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I entirely understand the deep concern of the House at the allegations of the use of chemical weapons, but I deny absolutely any impression that the United Kingdom has not been in the van of those pressing this case. In fact, we have been simultaneously denounced by many people in the Arab world for being so far in the forefront of the attack. We have sustained our position. It was we who took the matter up in the United Nations and pressed for an authoritative independent investigation, and we should still like such an investigationas c to take place, but we have received insufficient support from our colleagues in the United Nations. We were ready to welcome Iraq's undertaking not to use chemical weapons either inside or outside the country, given as a result of our representations, and we shall continue to press the case. But it would be wholly foolish, when the rest of the world is continuing to maintain trading relations with a large and important country, for us single-handed and unilaterally to make such a protest.

The House must understand that we are maintaining contact with Iraq and pressing the case against chemical weapons. We are looking at any evidence that is forthcoming, and we are acting more energetically and effectively than any other country.

United Nations

2. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what subjects were discussed at recent meetings between Her Majesty's ambassador at the United Nations and the new President of the General Assembly.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No such meeting has yet taken place. However, Dr. Caputo, in his capacity as Chairman of the United Nations General Assembly, has asked to see our permanent representative to the United Nations, Sir Crispin Tickell. The invitation has been accepted, but no date has yet been fixed.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Are we warming to the Argentines?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We have been pressing on the Argentines initiative after initiative for movements towards the re-establishment of more normal relations. As I have said many times, the table of my opposite number is groaning with the weight of fresh proposals. For example, as long ago as 1982 we removed all financial and trading discrimination, but the Argentines' response has been disappointing. They are continuing to discriminate against British goods and firms despite all that we have tried to do to press them in the opposite direction.

We are still trying—as I told the House that we were in 1986—to see whether it is possible to establish a multilateral framework for the management of fisheries disputes. We have been looking constantly for a way of normalising relations, but sadly there has been an insufficient response.

Sir Peter Blaker: Will my right hon. and learned Friend convey to the President of the General Assembly and to the United States Administration the dismay of many hon. Members on both sides of the House who are well disposed towards the United Nations at the refusal of a visa to Mr. Yasser Arafat? The Palestine National Council in Algiers went a long way towards accepting the existence of the state of Israel and United Nations resolutions 242 and 338, and this decision is likely to make the task of the moderates in the PLO more difficult.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My right hon. Friend has made an important point very clearly and effectively. We took the opportunity during yesterday's debate to make entirely clear our view that Mr. Arafat should have been allowed to address the General Assembly, and that that was the legal obligation of the United States under the headquarters agreement. We should have liked to hear him confirm there the very point made by my right hon. Friend —that the PLO supports an international conference on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 and rejects terrorism.

The additional point that is vexing Opposition Members is this. We want a positive response from the United States on this matter. We pressed the substance of the resolution in our own statement and we supported the statement that was made by the Twelve to achieve it, but we did not think that we were likely to bring about a change in the United States attitude by supporting a resolution couched in intemperate language. We have made our position absolutely clear. There is a mutuality of obligation in the United Nations. The host country owes an obligation to the Establishment, and the Establishment owes a duty to the United States. I invite the House to acknowledge that we have pressed this case and that we shall continue to do so as vigorously as is required.

Mr. Steel: Surely the Secretary of State accepts that intemperate action is worse in foreign affairs than intemperate language. That is what we have seen by the United States in its refusal of the visa. Those of us who have had contact with the PLO over the years have urged the recognition of United Nation resolutions such as No. 242. Now that that recognition is forthcoming, it is lamentable that the visa has been refused. The British ambassador should be given more robust instructions than simply to abstain from voting.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have made absolutely clear the extent to which we regret the refusal of the visa, and so did our spokesman in New York yesterday in concert with the representatives of the other member states. Mr. Arafat should have been allowed to address the General Assembly, but the question is how we can best move forward in the future. I am prepared to assure the House that the United Kingdom's credit with our friends in the Arab world and in the United States is substantial enough and strong enough for it to be understood when we say that Mr. Arafat should have been heard, and we say it in language that is more likely to produce a positive response from the United States.

Mr. Lawrence: Is it not patently obvious that if Mr. Arafat and the PLO were serious about peace with Israel they would explicitly recognise the existence of the state of Israel, rather than just hint at it, that they would explicitly renounce violence—which they do not even hint at—and that they would not explicitly demand that the capital of the Palestinian state should be Jerusalem?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. and learned Friend is right to remind the House of the familiar conditions for the debate to go forward, but it is also right to acknowledge, as we have, that the statements that have emerged from the Palestine National Council meeting in Algiers are important moves in a positive direction and should be acknowledged as such. It is for that reason that we left the United Nations in no doubt, and now leave the House in no doubt, that we think that Mr. Arafat should have been heard. It would have been an opportunity for him to make clear to the United Nations the PLO's explicit acceptance of my hon. and learned Friend's points. We want progress to be made in that direction and we should like action to be taken by both sides. We think that yesterday the United Nations reached the right judgment on the substance but that the language used was not best calculated to produce the change of heart in the United States that we want. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) interrupts. We proposed a series of alternative wordings that we think would have been more likely to allow the United States to reach the right conclusion. However, the House should be in no doubt that the case to be made by Mr. Arafat on behalf of the PLO ought to have been heard, because the concessions and the movements that have been made in Algiers are important.

Mr. Kaufman: What a wriggling, snivelling response we have had from the Foreign Secretary. How can he offer any justification for the pusillanimous abstention by Britain yesterday in the Legal Committee when 129 nations voted in favour of a modest, sensible resolution which simply asked the United States to reconsider what it had done? Would it not have been a good idea to give Mr. Arafat the opportunity to state before the General Assembly what was implicit and clear in the Algiers declaration—that the PLO recognises resolutions 242 and 338—and also what Mr. Faisal Awaida of the PLO said explicitly in London yesterday—that the PLO is ready to recognise the state of Israel? Is it not an abuse by the United States of its position as host to the United Nations that it should decide on domestic grounds who should be allowed to address the General Assembly of the United Nations? If indeed a past association with terrorism is a disqualification from being allowed into the United States, how did Mr. Shamir—an acknowledged former terrorist —ever get in?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman must come back to the point that I have made repeatedly this afternoon. What the representative of Her Majesty's Government said in the United Nations yesterday is precisely as follows:

> "I wish to make clear that in the view of the British Government Mr. Yasser Arafat, chairman of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, should have been allowed to come to the United Nations headquarters in New York. This is the legal obligation of the United States. My delegation endorses the opinion given on this matter by the United Nations legal council"——[**Hon. Members:** But——]"but just as we believe that the United States should show respect for the United Nations, so we believe that the United Nations should show respect for the United States. This mutual respect should have been reflected in the language of the resolution."

If the House wants to get effective action by the United States, which is not just an important ally but a most important actor in the Arab-Israel dispute, it makes sense for us to set about the matter in a fashion likely to produce that result.

Caribbean

3. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited states in the Caribbean region.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Eggar): My right hon. and learned Friend was last in the Caribbean in January 1987, when he visited Barbados for discussions with the then Prime Minister and members of his Government. I will be attending the Miami conference later this week and also visiting Jamaica, Anguilla and Montserrat.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: What progress, if any, has been made in co-ordinating efforts to combat the appalling problem of drug trafficking in the region? Will my hon. Friend make representations on that subject during his forthcoming visit?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend is right. There is a significant problem both of domestic drug growing and of trafficking, the latter being from South America through to the United States and Europe. With the United States, we initiated a joint survey of the problem. We have made a number of recommendations to Caribbean Governments. They have been followed through with a meeting in Barbados. I shall have discussions with Prime Ministers and others in the next few days about increasing co-operation even further.

There has been one setback, in that it appears that hurricane Gilbert managed to destroy almost all agricultural crops in Jamaica except the ganja crop.

Mrs. Mahon: During his visit, will the Minister consider visiting the Atlantic city of Bluefields, which has been completely destroyed by hurricane Joe? The world service recently reported that there was a major ecological disaster there. Will the Minister consider giving Bluefields aid, through the agency of the garrison at Belize, on the same scale as that provided for Jamaica?

Mr. Eggar: As the hon. Lady is aware, the Government have made well over £250,000 available to Nicaragua to assist with emergency relief. A great deal of that money has gone to the Bluefields area.

Chile

4. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the steps he is taking to assist a smooth transition to democracy in Chile.

Mr. Eggar: Both we and our partners in the Twelve fully support the transition to democracy in Chile. We will continue to encourage an orderly and peaceful restoration of democracy in that country.

Mr. Macdonald: I welcome the Minister's expression of support—however subdued—for the plebiscite in Chile. He must be aware that Amnesty International has reported several trangressions of human rights in Chile since the plebiscite. That makes it clear that all Governments must give their full support to the progress of democracy in Chile. What practical steps is the Minister taking, independently of the EEC, to achieve such progress?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman must be aware that we welcomed the result of the plebiscite in unequivocal terms, and we welcome the measures that have been taken to return to democracy in Chile. We welcome in particular the responsible attitude taken by the democratic

Opposition during the run-up to the plebiscite and subsequent to it. The hon. Gentleman referred to human rights in Chile. We have urged privately and publicly for the Chilean Government to respect human rights. I did so most recently when I met the Chilean Foreign Minister in Quito in August. Our ambassador in Chile does so as well and I welcome in particular the Chilean Government's decision to ratify important international agreements, which they did on 15 September.

Mr. Foulkes: Does the Minister accept that the excellent plebiscite result was just a first step towards democracy? Will he confirm that when he met Ricardo Lagos, the leader of the Partido por la Democracia yesterday, he was urged that the British Government should join other European Governments, particularly at the Rhodes summit, to support further the process of the restoration of democracy and to prepare actively for co-operation with the new democratic Government in Chile? Will the Minister answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) and say what practical steps Her Majesty's Government intend to take over the next 12 months to support the new democracy in Chile, because it is vitally important that Britain is seen as the friend of the new democracy in Chile and not as an ally of the old, discredited dictatorship?

Mr. Eggar: It must be up to the Chileans to decide how they wish to return to democracy. That was the message that Mr. Lagos gave to me yesterday and which other democratic opposition leaders have given. We shall continue, as we have in the past, to do everything that we can to assist the return to democracy in Chile, but the primary responsibility must continue to lie with the Chilean people.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is it not noteworthy that the plebiscite was conducted fairly and that the Chilean Government intend to implement in full the provisions of the 1980 constitution, leading to elections for the national assembly and the presidency in December this year and for the transfer of power in March next year? Is the situation in Chile not markedly different from that in Peru, where there is widespread guerrilla warfare and chaos, in Brazil and Argentina, where there is hyper-inflation, and in Columbia, where the drug barons rule?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend is right. Every undertaking in the 1980 constitution has been carried out to the letter by the Chilean Government and it is right that the House should recognise that.

Palestine National Council

5. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the Palestine National Council's recent declaration in Algiers.

12. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been his response to the recent Palestine National Council declaration.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: We do not believe that the declaration of a Palestinian state helps to carry matters forward. But the other decisions taken by the Palestine National Council represent a positive and potentially important step towards a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israel conflict.

Mr. Nicholson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that there is gratitude and good will from the middle east for Her Majesty's Government's balanced and positive attitude on the question—unlike that of some others that I could mention—and will he pledge that the Government will continue to pursue this matter on its merits, irrespective of external threats and blackmail, and of internal political lobbying?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend accurately sums up the position of Her Majesty's Government. We certainly seek to maintain a balanced, energetic and effective approach. We shall continue to press the case for progress on the peace process at every possible opportunity.

Mr. Marlow: While supporting totally my right hon. and learned Friend in his answer to Qn 2, at this important time when results are important and rhetoric is not, may I ask whether my right hon. and learned Friend will help to bring about those results by seeking to encourage still further the courageous initiative by the moderate Palestinians in the face of extreme Israeli provocation by seeking out an early meeting with Palestinian representatives at the highest level?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am sure the House will wish to record the important conclusion of my hon. Friend on results and rhetoric—that is certainly our preference. He knows that we engage in regular dialogue at official levels with the PLO. It is important for the PLO to continue to clarify its position if further and wider contact is to be possible. That is one reason why we would have welcomed an opportunity for Mr. Arafat to be able to address the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Janner: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the purpose of our policy in the middle east must be to encourage the promotion of peace, and that, if there is to be peace, the involvement of both sides is required? Does he further agree that if Her Majesty's Government are regarded as being entirely on one side their prospects of being of assistance in the peace process are gravely reduced? Whatever Government may result from Israel's recent turbulent election, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognise that neither major party there is prepared to deal with the PLO unless and until it renounces terrorism now?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, progress in the central Arab-Israeli problem depends on the response from both sides. That is why unhelpful unilateral actions by either side do not carry the matter forward. That relates to a number of actions that have been taken unilaterally by the Israeli Government. If action is to be taken by both sides, I urge the Israeli Government to echo the view of the entire House and respond positively to the steps taken by the Palestine National Council. We now look to Israel to make a parallel commitment to the peace process to match the forward movement made by the PNC in Algiers.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Surely the Foreign Secretary cannot ignore the fact that the conditions for Britain moving forward in our relationship with the PLO were laid down by his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when she said that the PLO would have to renounce terrorism and accept resolutions 242 and 338. The Palestinians have now done that and, we understand, have done so democratically, with the minority who lost the vote accepting it publicly and completely— with no abstentions. In an earlier reply the Foreign Secretary said that the Arab world well understands our position, but our position will not be well understood if we now start to move the goal posts. The Foreign Secretary must do something now to respond to the initiative taken by the Palestinians in Algiers.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The position is entirely clear. For a long time we and many other people have been pressing the PLO to forward movement on the points mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. We have secured an explicit rejection of terrorism—that is important. We have secured acceptance of resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for an international conference—that is important. However, there is not yet an explicit recognition of Israel, nor is there yet a renunciation of violence in Israel and the occupied territories. We want to see those ambiguities cleared up if further progress is to be made. In response to the progress that has already been made, and which I have described as positive, we are entitled to look—and we do look—to the Government of Israel for a matching and positive response.

Mr. Cormack: If the representative of the PLO has continued difficulties in presenting his case to the United Nations, will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind that there is a most admirable building across the river that would provide excellent headquarters for the General Assembly, if only for a temporary session?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The suggestion has not so far been made by anybody else, but it is certainly right that Mr. Arafat should have the opportunity to be heard. The suggestion has been canvassed of a General Assembly meeting perhaps in Geneva, and depending on the resolution there for discussion we shall determine our position. As I say, Mr. Arafat should be given the opportunity to be heard on behalf of the PLO, if only to resolve the remaining ambiguities in PLO policy.

Mr. Sillars: Am I right in saying that the Secretary of State said earlier that the dialogue will continue with the PLO at official level? Given the implications of the acceptance in the Algerian declaration, why does the Secretary of State not personally meet Yasser Arafat now?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The qualifications that are relevant in that have been clear for a long time. They include recognition of Israel's right to a secure existence and a renunciation of violence in Israel, in the occupied territories. As I have said, significant progress was made in the discussions in Algiers, but ambiguities remain, so the same considerations have to be taken into account.

Mr. Speaker: No. 6.

Mr. Faulds: Really. This is disgraceful. Two major questions.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is disgraceful behaviour.

Angola

6. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the agreement reached in Geneva on a timetable for Cuban troops' withdrawal from Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: We have lent our full support to the United States-led negotiations. We warmly welcome the recent agreement on a timetable for Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. We urge the parties to move forward to implementation of the United Nations plan for Namibian independence.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this agreement and the reprieve of the Sharpeville Six show that talking forcefully to the South African Government is rather more effective than sanctions or boycotts? Could she tell the House the Government's view about the possibility of a pre-independence conference about Namibia?

Mrs. Chalker: We have always advocated that dialogue and negotiations will produce the best outcomes. The tenacious advocacy of Dr. Chester Crocker and his leadership of the quadripartite talks have brought us to this successful position in respect of the Angola agreement between South Africa, Angola and Cuba. We warmly welcome the news that the Sharpeville Six have been reprieved. Hon. Members will know that we have made repeated representations on behalf of the Six, including the Prime Minister's own appeal. On the question of the future of Namibia, it is right that we should proceed on the United Nations plan, which has been agreed by all, and which will be impartially monitored by the United Nations. There is nothing to be gained and much might be lost if we were now to reopen the principles of the Security Council resolution 435. We welcome the recent direct contacts between SWAPO and leading Namibians.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Hughes, on a point of order.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I could hardly hear the Minister's answer.

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Member wish to ask a question?

Mr. Hughes: Yes.

While I think we all welcome some progress in the discussions in southern Africa about Namibia, and while we welcome in addition to the Sharpeville Six reprieve the release of Harry Gwala and Zephia Mothopeng, may I ask the Minister of State whether she realises that South Africa is already prevaricating on the agreement that it purports to have reached? It is demanding that it should be part of the monitoring operation on Cuban withdrawal. It is suggesting a much later timetable and introducing fresh discussions by saying that UNITA must by involved in some discussions with the Angolan Government before Namibia is free. That has nothing to do with resolution 435 on Namibia. Will the Minister ensure that the utmost pressure, including sanctions, is maintained until South Africa can show that it can keep its word?

Mrs. Chalker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman's head is all right following the earlier incident.

On the more serious matter, we believe that the agreement will pave the way for an early implementation of the UN plan for Namibian independence. We also believe that the South Africans will act in good faith, but we shall judge them by their deeds. They have compelling reasons—economic, military and political—to sign the settlement that they have reached, and I believe that the terms will be acceptable. As to the creation of internal peace in Angola, there cannot be a lasting peace unless people come together. I do not believe that it is for Britain or other outside countries to prescribe how that internal peace should be brought about. I know that many African Heads of Government are seeking to help, and we sincerely hope that they will be successful in bringing about peace in Angola between all the parties.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Is it not surprising that, in these welcome results from the Geneva talks, no mention was made of Jonas Savimbi and UNITA, which is an important force in Angola? Will my right hon. Friend accept that, unless there is reconciliation between UNITA and the MPLA, there will be no lasting peace and stability in Southern Africa? If reconciliation can be achieved in that country, elections in Namibia can be free and fair, and following elections there, further progress and accommodation can be achieved in the Republic of South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: Of course I believe that all parties must come together, and as one African leader said to me earlier this month, it would be difficult to negotiate with a body without a head. Therefore, it seems sensible that the process of creating international peace will require all parties to come together.

Mr. Anderson: Naturally, like the Minister, we warmly welcome the signs of movement in southern Africa, but should not the South African moves be seen in the context of the South Africans' economic difficulties? Is not their current diplomatic offensive essentially to buy time and divert opinion from their internal problems? Therefore, will the right hon. Lady assure the House that the Foreign Office will try to restrain the Prime Minister from visiting South Africa and giving a royal blessing on that country until there are real signs of movement on apartheid?

Mrs. Chalker: We are absolutely at one in wishing to see the agreements over Angola and Namibia concluded successfully and peacefully, and the progression towards achieving internal peace in Angola. As I said to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), there are compelling reasons, which should not be underestimated because they happen to be economic and political. We must judge the South African Government by their deeds. As to the speculation about the travels of my right hon. Friend, they remain that—just speculation.

Council of Ministers

7. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next attend a meeting of the European Community Council of Ministers; and what subjects he expects to discuss.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The next Foreign Affairs Council will be held on 19 and 20 December. Subjects currently on the agenda are GATT, New Zealand butter and sheepmeat, hormones, Community and EFTA relations and steel tariffs.

Mrs. Ewing: Given that today is St. Andrew's day, if not every Andrew's day, can the Foreign Secretary tell us on how many occasions he has been accompanied to the Council of Ministers by the Secretary of State for Scotland?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have not had the pleasure of that experience. At meetings of the Council, representatives of the United Kingdom speak for the United Kingdom as a whole and the policies of Her Majesty's Government make sure that the interests of every part of the kingdom are taken into account.

Mr. Soames: In the course of those busy meetings, will my right hon. and learned Friend see whether he can raise with our partners in the EEC the pressing difficulties relating to European air traffic control? Is he aware of the tremendous inconvenience to which enormous numbers of people were put last summer? Will he do his best to try to put the matter at the top of the agenda?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As my hon. Friend and I share the privilege of being neighbours of Gatwick airport, I share his concern about the point that he has raised. There was an effective meeting of Euro control last week at which those issues were advanced. We shall continue to press the case that he has put forward.

Rev. Martin Smyth: When the Foreign Secretary speaks to his fellow Ministers, will he underline the perhaps naive view of people in Northern Ireland that Governments are there to protect law-abiding people and to punish evildoers? Will he therefore support his right hon. Friend's comment that high-sounding declarations are not sufficient when dealing with terrorists, unless they are backed by deeds?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall certainly emphasise the point made by the hon. Gentleman. It is of the utmost importance that, when correct legal procedures are followed, extradition requests are prepared in consultation with another Government and no grounds are given for believing that they are incomplete or insufficient, the necessary will should be forthcoming to ensure that people who should be brought to trial do face trial.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my right hon. and learned Friend take the opportunity on St. Andrew's day, which also happens to be the 114th anniversary of the birth of Winston Churchill, to remind the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) that, if her dream of secession of North Britain from Great Britain is achieved, she will also have achieved the secession of North Britain from Europe and that it will require to get over the veto of Great Britain to get back in there?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No one could put the point as effectively as my hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Alton: Does the Foreign Secretary accept that there is concern among many hon. Members about the failure to extradite Mr. Ryan? When he raises the matter with the Belgian and Irish Governments, will he also bear in mind that this does at least present us now with the opportunity to press for European Community-wide legislation to combat terrorism? Does he agree that, in accord with the concept of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, it would be far better to underpin our joint determination to fight terrorism if that legislation were jointly enacted by the House and the Dail?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I can understand the force of the general case made by the hon. Gentleman, but no part of the law has so far been more carefully preserved for national enactment and consideration than the criminal codes. There are wide variations between the countries of the Community in respect of criminal law, so it is all the more important for us to secure effective, sustained and workable co-operation in arrangements for extradition and matters of that kind. It is important that both partners to the Anglo-Irish Agreement should recognise that we have a joint, sustained and important interest in achieving effective action in the courts against terrorism.

Sir John Stokes: Will my right hon. and learned Friend ask the Council of Ministers if it could forcefully instruct the Commission against interfering in petty and stupid details? Is he aware, for instance, that English sterling silver, which is unequalled throughout the world, has recently had its hallmark stopped by some faceless EEC bureaucrat and an EEC number substituted?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is our constant purpose to diminish the number of regulations applying throughout Europe. It is for that reason that we recognise the case, in certain examples, for having a single common European standard rather than 12 diverse different ones. I shall consider the point raised by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Mullin: Is not the main obstacle in persuading other European Governments to help us with effective extradition the widespread belief that an Irish person charged with a terrorist offence cannot hope to receive a fair trial in this country? Is that not boosted by the conviction of the six innocent people for the Birmingham pub bombing and the 11 innocent people held in connection with the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings? If we wish to occupy the moral high ground and to work out effective extradition procedures, would it not be best to face the fact that, in those cases, we have made a terrible mistake?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It cannot be stated too clearly and too often that all sides and all nations that are concerned with the intensely difficult struggle against well-organised terrorism have an equally important interest in the effectiveness of action to bring terrorists to trial, and in the justice of the trial proceedings when they take place. There is no doubt about that. One of the purposes of the exchanges that we have throughout Europe and through the Anglo-Irish Agreement is to promote progress on both those fronts. The patterns for scrutiny of decisions of the courts in this country, subject as they are, in due course, to the European Commission on Human Rights, will stand comparison with those anywhere in the world. If we are seeking to enhance confidence in the British system of justice, the hon. Gentleman should think twice before advancing some of the allegations that he has put forward this afternoon.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that in matters concerning the European Community, as in other matters of foreign policy, he enjoys a degree of admiration and support that extends well beyond Conservative Benches? Does he agree that there is no need to set up another body to give my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister the sort of foreign policy advice that Sir Horace Wilson gave to Neville Chamberlain?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. I do not think that any such body is in contemplation.

Ms. Short: The Foreign Secretary will know that there has been speculation that the EEC might take an initiative to back a two-stage solution in the middle east. What is the Government's view about that? There is a real chance now of peace between the Palestinians and Israel, but his remarks earlier this afternoon were incredibly biased. The degree of terror that Israel is using in the Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza should be denounced by the right hon. and learned Gentleman, just as he has denounced the acts in which Palestinian individuals have engaged. There is a chance for peace. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman take a lead? Will Europe take a lead?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Lady should recall that last week in Brussels, at the end of a long discussion on the subject by the Foreign Ministers of the Community, not only yesterday in New York, we all recorded our unanimous view that what has happened in Algiers represents a positive step forward, to which there should be an Israeli response. We recorded our continuing concern, which we have expressed many times, at the implications of the violence that is committed by the Israeli Government and Israeli forces in the occupied territories. We deplore violence of whatever sort that is committed by either side. We look for a positive response from both sides to get a conference working through which it will be possible to arrive at a solution.

United States of America

8. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited the United States of America; and what matters were discussed.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I last visited the United States to attend the United Nations General Assembly in September. A range of issues were discussed with those I saw there.

Mr. Rowe: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is enormously important, at the start of a new presidency, that relations between western Europe and the United States should be as warm as possible? If it is true that there is a 1:3 imbalance between the conventional forces of the Warsaw pact and those of NATO, should not the contributions of the Americans to NATO be recognised? Should not that prove something of a spur to western European countries to make greater contributions themselves?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend is entirely right to say that, in the context of our continued maintenance of the Atlantic Alliance for our effective defence, burden-sharing is the most important item on the agenda. I have no doubt that the new President of the United States will address himself to the American aspect of that. It is important that the European partners should be ready to play their full part to sustain the strength of the Alliance.

Mr. Grocott: Does the Foreign Secretary share my relief at the fact that the deeply embarrassing client relationship between the Prime Minister and President Reagan is coming to an end? Does he share my hope that under the new President—I hope that he will use his influence to ensure this—we shall start again to pursue an independent foreign policy of our own and cease to be a satellite state of the United States?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman lives in a land of illusion. One of the most important features of British foreign policy in the past decade has been the growing influence of Her Majesty's Government under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in the United States as well as in the European Community. I hope very much that that effective relationship will continue with the new President.

Persian Gulf

9. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the prospects for peace in the Persian Gulf area.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. William Waldegrave): We welcome the continuation of the ceasefire and of talks between Iran and Iraq under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General, who enjoys our full support. Our objective remains a just and comprehensive settlement through full implementation of Security Council resolution 598.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Does my hon. Friend agree that in spite of the major difficulties that we have had with both the countries involved it is important that Britain should try to maintain a balanced relationship with Iraq and Iran?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. Neither country conducts its affairs in ways that would meet with the approval of this House, but both are important regional powers and we cannot ignore their existence or their importance in their regions.

Mr. Cohen: Will the Minister investigate the claim that Iran has started a new wave of killings of political prisoners in Kerman prison and others? It is reported that 50 leading members of the Tudeh party and a total of 5,000 political prisoners have been killed recently. Will he investigate that matter urgently?

Mr. Waldegrave: I have seen the reports to which the hon. Gentleman refers. There are serious human rights problems in Iran still. We have our own problems as Mr. Cooper and Mr. Nichola are prisoners there who should be released or brought to trial. They should be released.

South Africa

10. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to do so.

Mr. Bellingham: When the Minister visits South Africa, she will have a chance to enter our embassy in either Cape Town or Pretoria. When she visits it, she will be able to come and go in peace, in stark contrast to South Africa House, where diplomats and visitors are verbally abused, jostled and harassed by hooligans with loudhailers. Surely it is time to remove the picket. Will she have urgent discussions with the Home Secretary about that?

Mrs. Chalker: I regret all demonstrations that disrupt law and order on our streets. However, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. The issue of demonstrators outside embassies is a matter for the Metropolitan police and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I will bring my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Flannery: When the Minister goes to South Africa again, will she raise the issue of the number of black people who are jostled and harassed in South Africa by the Botha Government and by the incoming Tory Government in South Africa? Will she mention the number of people still being hanged every morning in South Africa? Will she raise all the issues which a whole number of people on the Government Benches who travel to South Africa, paid for by the South African Government, never raise at all and clearly agree with?

Mrs. Chalker: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows me well enough to realise that I will take every opportunity provided to me to raise those cases which we believe, and have consistently believed, should be raised with the South African Government. In fact, I did that during a private weekend visit when I spent most of that weekend in the three townships of Soweto, Mamelodi and Alexandra, when I saw the conditions for myself. I also saw the help that the British Government are giving to black people in South Africa in health, education, housing and training. Where cases involve internal matters in South Africa, we can raise those with Ministers, but we cannot direct them in what to do. The people have elected that Government, even though it is a minority white Government.

Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress of, and the present position on, the Vienna review conference on security and co-operation in Europe.

Mr. Waldegrave: Provisional agreement has been reached on a large number of issues at the Vienna CSCE meeting, including useful new commitments in human rights. We hope that it can be concluded soon, but we continue to believe that the right result is more important than an early result.

Mr. Chapman: In welcoming the further progress that has been made, may I ask my hon. Friend to confirm that there are still some basic human rights issues outstanding and that until the Warsaw pact countries unambiguously accept some of those basic human rights, not least the freedoms of religion, travel and visiting, no meaningful purpose can be served by starting the conventional stability talks? Does he agree that there is an opportunity to make that point precisely within the next fortnight during the very welcome visit by President Gorbachev to this country?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is quite right. My right hon. Friend will be making those points when President Gorbachev visits Britain. There has been progress in the Soviet Union, but there is still much more to be made. As my hon. Friend knows, in other Warsaw pact countries, such as Romania, no progress is being made—as many hon. Members on both sides of the House have written to me to emphasise—and there have been important steps backwards in human rights.

Mr. Lamond: Are the Government maintaining their determination not to agree to a third meeting of the committee on human relations, which is proposed to be held in Moscow? Are we maintaining resistance to that on the grounds that, although in eastern Europe they are extending human rights quite a lot, and certainly will have done so by 1991, we in Britain are moving in the opposite direction?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is free to experiment in Romania if he considers that is preferable. We have the greatest scepticism about the Moscow human rights conference. Many groups of people concerned with human rights on both sides of the Iron Curtain have written to us to urge caution. On the other hand, as Mr. Sakharov said, if it is accompanied by the right conditions it might well be an opportunity for further progress. We shall look at the conditions on offer, and we shall make up our minds then. Until the last minute before that conference takes place, if things go backwards we shall reserve the right to withdraw from it.

Scottish Transport Group

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the future of the Scottish Transport Group.

In my statements to the House on 27 January and 24 May, I said that I had decided to privatise the Scottish Bus Group and to do so in about 10 units. I also said that I would give further careful consideration to the implications for the future of Caledonian MacBrayne. As the House will know, it was announced in the Queen's Speech that legislation to privatise the Scottish Bus Group and make arrangements for the future of Caledonian MacBrayne would be introduced this Session. The Transport (Scotland) Bill is being laid before the House today.

I will deal first with Caledonian MacBrayne, which provides a wide range of shipping services on the west coast of Scotland. Many of these services provide a lifeline to the islands they serve. It is essential that these services should be maintained together with the greatly improved standards which we have built up since we came to office, with new ships and new piers. With this background very much in mind, we have looked carefully at a range of options in considering the future of Caledonian MacBrayne. Certain quite distinctive types of service are provided and different solutions might well be appropriate in the interests of both customers and taxpayers.

First, there are the services provided within the relatively sheltered waters of the Clyde; secondly, the services provided by major ships on the more difficult waters of the west coast; and thirdly, the short crossings to individual islands provided by smaller vessels. In the upper Clyde there is a clear anomaly in the case of the Gourock-Dunoon route, where Caledonian MacBrayne is running a subsidised service on a similar route to a commercial operation provided by Western Ferries. This route should be able to operate satisfactorily on the basis of private funding, as could CalMac's Wemyss Bay-Rothesay route which is provided by the same group of vessels. However, we fully recognise that for the remaining services operated by Caledonian MacBrayne, significant subsidies will for the most part continue to be needed in order to maintain the present level of service. Our examination of the present structure and methods of operation of CalMac, however, has led me to conclude that there is considerable scope for getting better value for the money which we—and the passengers—spend on these services.

In the light of the early dissolution of the Scottish Transport Group, of our examination of the options, and taking account of the many views expressed to us, I have decided that the best arrangement for Caledonian MacBrayne is that it should become a company owned in the first instance by the Secretary of State. A new board for the company will be appointed and will contain some people with commercial expertise, including some with first-hand knowledge of the islands served and their needs. I believe it is right for the headquarters of the new company to be nearer the centre of the area which it serves, and consider that Oban would be likely to prove the most suitable place from which to operate.

I will ask the new board to explore the possibility of transferring to the private sector the Gourock-Dunoon and Wemyss Bay-Rothesay routes. For the remaining services, I will ask it to examine existing practices carefully in order to find more efficient and cost-effective ways of delivering the present standard of service. No options for the longer term will be excluded, subject to the overriding proviso that they must ensure at least the present quality of service to the islands.

As far as the Scottish Bus Group is concerned, I have, with my financial advisers, Quayle Munro, given further consideration to the pattern of privatisation. I have decided that the Scottish Bus Group should be offered for sale as 11 units. Nine of those units are existing subsidiaries of the Scottish Bus Group. They are the seven existing geographical operating subsidiaries—Lowland, Eastern, Strathtay, Highland, Fife, Northern and Midland, the coaching firm Scottish Citylink, and the engineering subsidiary, SBG Engineering.

The other two units for privatisation will be created by the combination of two pairs of existing geographical subsidiaries, Western and Clydeside, which will be privatised as one unit, as will Central and Kelvin. That pattern of privatisation is designed to create viable companies and the basis for sustained and balanced competition within the Scottish bus market to the benefit of bus travellers. The combination of subsidiaries round Glasgow takes account of the competitive situation in that city.

I am keen that this privatisation should increase employee participation. I know that there is already considerable interest among employees in taking part in the privatisation. I welcome that. It will be encouraged by the provision of financial assistance to management-employee teams wanting to bid for their companies and offering the prospect of locally based management with real employee participation.

The arrangements that I am announcing today for both CalMac and the Scottish Bus Group will provide the basis for maintaining and improving services to the Scottish public, for creating vigorous new Scottish companies, with which local communities will identify, and for getting better value for money where public subsidy will still be required.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The statement on Caledonian MacBrayne represents a major retreat by the Secretary of State and a tacit recognition by even this prejudiced Government that privatisation is not a universal remedy, and certainly not the best way to provide essential public services. The decision is a tribute to the coherent case argued by the communities that depend on those services and by my hon. Friends who have taken a particular interest in the matter.

I welcome the retreat but, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman will recognise, many questions remain unanswered. We have been told that the bulk of Caledonian MacBrayne's operations will be transferred, in the first instance, to a company owned by the Secretary of State. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman end the uncertainty and recognise the logic of his decision by ruling out the possibility of further asset stripping? Will he give an assurance that the board of the new company will be genuinely representative of the areas it serves and will not be burdened with a remit to sell out as and when possible?

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's statement struggled painfully to reconcile reality with his ideology. He knows that he cannot deliver what he wanted, so we are left with interference to very little purpose. Is he satisfied that the arrangements for Caledonian MacBrayne will allow the present level of European assistance to continue?

The Secretary of State referred to the new board exploring the possibility of the transfer of the Gourock-Dunoon and Wemyss Bay-Rothesay service. Does that mean that the company, having examined the options, can refuse? Will the board have the independence of action that will allow such a refusal?

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that there is no need to fragment Caledonian MacBrayne services in that way? Does he recall the last time that the Government tried to hand the Gourock-Dunoon route to the private sector in the form of Western Ferries? He should, because he was the Minister in charge of that disaster. In the light of that experience, will he guarantee that public opinion will be consulted on this occasion?

Many interests will regret that the Scottish Bus Group is to be split in the way described. However, I welcome the emphasis on employee participation. I hope that the financial support to which the Minister referred will be realistic. Does he recall that, of the 72 component companies of the National Bus Group in England, only two went to employee participation buy-outs? That underlines the need for financial help to be more than cosmetic—more than mere window dressing—if it is to be a success.

What protection will there be against predators from south of the border or, indeed, of the home-grown variety, of which Stagecoach is the most feared? Our interests will be to ensure that the conditions of service and the pensions of employees are secured and that the level of service for the travelling public is protected, especially in rural areas and during off-peak hours. The whole exercise is a political manoeuvre which has no public support. The Secretary of State should recognise that the realities that forced the Caledonian MacBrayne retreat apply, too, to the Scottish Bus Group as a whole. A further retreat would be very much in the public interest.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman never ceases to entertain the House. In response to my comments on Caledonian MacBrayne, he began by describing the statement as a triumph for the Opposition—and then proceeded to criticise every detail in it. He must make up his mind how he interprets the statement.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, the simple fact is that, when I spoke about Caledonian MacBrayne some months ago, I made it clear that the Government had no preconception as to whether the privatisation of Caledonian MacBrayne would be a realistic option. I challenge the hon. Gentleman or any of his hon. Friends to quote any statement, phrase or suggestion to the contrary. What I said was that the Government's overriding priority since 1979 has been to maintain—indeed improve—the quality of service to the islands. We have allowed the resources needed to improve that service to be provided. Where there are services, such as Gourock-Dunoon and Wemyss Bay-Rothesay, where a subsidy is not needed, then it is inappropriate for subsidy to continue.

The hon. Gentleman asked me whether the Caledonian MacBrayne company, having investigated the matter, would be free to conclude that it did not wish to privatise those routes. It would be a curious line of argument that said that it would be appropriate to continue with one route being subsidised by the taxpayer in order to compete with another company which requires no subsidy and can make a profit on that basis. That is the basis upon which these proposals are put forward.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether European assistance will continue to be available to Caledonian MacBrayne. I understand that there is no reason why it should not be.

In reply to the hon. Gentleman's comments about the Scottish Bus Group, I welcome his rather late-in-the-day endorsement of employee buy-outs of public sector companies. It is not an issue with which he has been identified in the past. I was especially interested when he concluded his sterling comments by saying that the whole issue of the privatisation of bus services was "a political manoeuvre with no public support". If the hon. Gentleman believes that, will he explain why Grampian regional council—with the support of the Labour group on that council—is at present proposing to the Scottish Office that it should be allowed to privatise its bus service? I am informed that that has the support of all political parties on Grampian regional council.

Why is it that the Labour party in the Grampian region believes that the privatisation of its bus service is in the public interest, but the Labour party in the House believes that the privatisation of the Scottish Bus Group is somehow a completely different matter? I advise the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends to visit their Labour colleagues on Grampian regional council. They may not come away any wiser, but they will come away better informed.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): I join my right hon. and learned Friend in congratulating the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on at least a small step towards Damascus. I welcome, too, what he has said about the assistance to be offered to employee management buy-outs. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm the details of the assistance that may be available?

I shall ask my right hon. and learned Friend a more detailed question about the proposals for Western and Clydeside. My right hon. and learned Friend will know that I have made previous representations on behalf of a number of people in the industry, who considered that it would be better for those two companies to be privatised separately. Will he assure the House that those representations were taken seriously? Does he agree that it is important that the privatised companies should be able to compete fairly and effectively with Strathclyde Buses? Does he agree that the most effective way of ensuring that would be to privatise Strathclyde Buses?

Mr. Rifkind: I hope that Strathclyde regional council will follow the good precedent set by Grampian regional council, and do what is in the public interest.

We gave serious consideration to the flotation of Clydeside as an individual company, but the advice that we received suggested that the best prospect for the economic viability of Clydeside would be to combine it with Western. That is something that appeared to be in the interests both of those who work in Clydeside and those who use the bus services in that locality.

[Mr. Rifkind]

I am glad of my hon. Friend's welcome for employee participation. We shall be happy not only to give advice and assistance to those employees or those in management wishing to acquire their company, but, in line with similar previous privatisations, we hope that there will be some preference for a management or employee buy-out when this matter is finally dealt with after the passage of the necessary legislation.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): It is appropriate that, on St. Andrew's day, I am able to welcome most of the Secretary of State's statement on Caledonian MacBrayne.

The fact that the Government have listened to representations made, have seen the light and have decided to back off on the privatisations is welcome. Will the Secretary of State also accept my thanks for arranging, at short notice, for his colleague the Minister of State to meet a delegation of islanders to hear their views. I am delighted that he was prepared to listen.

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman also accept that I fully endorse his idea that the management and headquarters should be moved to Oban?

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Why did the hon. Lady not think of that?

Mrs. Michie: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I suggested it several times. I am delighted that the Secretary of State agrees that the headquarters should be moved to the centre of its operations.

Will the Secretary of State guarantee that, if anything is done in the future about Caledonian MacBrayne, any proposals will be referred first to the House? We must have primary legislation. *[Interruption.]* I just want to ensure that the Secretary of State will guarantee the future of Caledonian MacBrayne.

As for the Dunoon and Rothesay routes, will the Secretary of State promise that the board will listen carefully to the representations of the local people, remembering the anger and frustration expressed the last time the Government tried to interfere?

Briefly, if the Scottish Bus Group is to be privatised, we are glad that the Government are considering a staff-management buy-out. I hope that the Secretary of State will be able to guarantee the service——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Briefly, please.

Mrs. Michie: —the service in the rural areas.

Mr. Rifkind: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's welcome for the statement. It is important that, just as we often want the centre of corporate activities moved to the north of England, Scotland or Wales, so too, within Scotland, it is desirable, where appropriate, for companies' headquarters to be moved to the communities they serve. Hence the decision to move the headquarters to Oban.

We shall encourage a management and employee buy-out of the Scottish Bus Group, but we cannot guarantee that that will be the end result, because that will depend on the proposals eventually put before us for the flotation of the individual companies.

There is an anomaly that needs to be resolved regarding Gourock-Dunoon. It should be unnecessary to use taxpayers' money to subsidise a service to compete with another service that does not require a subsidy. Therefore, it would be proper and sensible to explore a way in which we can continue to ensure a proper service for those who use the route without the unnecessary subsidies of recent years.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): To cure the dementia of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), after he has spoken to the Socialist members of the Grampian region council perhaps he should, on his way south, call on those who run Strathtay Buses. Some 60 per cent. of that work force, to demonstrate that there is no public demand or interest, are presently putting £7,500 a week into a bank account to fund a management and employee buy-out. Will he ensure that their enthusiasm not only for running a successful bus group but for ridding themselves of the shackles of Socialism and union domination for ever is rewarded?

Mr. Rifkind: Not only do the employees of the Strathtay company think that way, but bus drivers in Bannockburn—that well-known centre of Scottish Conservatism—have appealed to the Government to allow employee participation in the acquisition of companies. In a survey of Scottish Bus Group employees in April, no fewer than 72 per cent. stated that, given the opportunity to invest in the company for which they work, they would like to do so. That is a splendid situation and one that flies in the face of Opposition attempts to deny them that opportunity.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The so-called desirable shifting of Caledonian MacBrayne's headquarters may not be considered so desirable by those of my constituents working in Gourock. The Secretary of State may laugh at this moment, but it is a deeply worrying concept for many of those constituents and I should like him to show some seriousness. What is to happen to those people? Will some of them be made redundant? If the headquarters moves to Oban, will employees receive financial assistance towards the cost of transferring to Oban or some such place?

Given that the company will be owned by the Secretary of State, can we safely assume that any replacement orders for vessels will be placed with Scottish yards?

Mr. Rifkind: I have said that Oban seems to be the likely and sensible place for Caledonian MacBrayne's headquarters, and that seemed to have the general approval of the House as a whole. I have no doubt that the company will be responsive in a sensible and sensitive way to the questions that the hon. Gentleman has legitimately raised about the interests of those currently working for the company. I certainly hope that arrangements will be made to meet his points.

As to his final question, whether the company is formally owned by the Secretary of State or is part of the Scottish Transport Group, as it has been for the past few years, will not in itself influence the decision on where contracts for the construction of new ships will be awarded. Those matters will continue to be determined on the same basis as in the past.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): As to real employee participation on the privatisation of the Scottish Bus Group, the Secretary of State must know that attempts by his opposite number in England were a singular failure and that employee participation did not come into existence when privatisation took place there. The only way of achieving it in Scotland will be by imposing such financial conditions as will allow employee participation.

The hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) mentioned that Strathtay is well advanced in the matter of employee participation proposals. He must also know that a whole host of predators made a very fast buck from English privatisation and have already clearly stated that they will come into the Scottish market. How does the Secretary of State intend ensuring that there will be genuine employee participation by Scottish employees of the Scottish Bus Group?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that experience south of the border was that, while there was great success with management buy-outs of individual companies, the number in which employees were fully involved was far fewer. We hope to see a different pattern, with a much larger proportion of employee as well as management interest in the acquisition of Scottish companies. I cannot predict the outcome today, because a guarantee cannot be given to any one potential purchaser that they will be bound to succeed irrespective of the price offered. The companies are public assets, and Opposition Members would be the first to complain if they were disposed of for less than their true value. We must be sure that the ultimate purchasers of the bus companies pay a price commensurate with the value of the assets.

That having been said, of course we wish to give preference—as I have said—to management and employee proposals. The precise way in which that will operate has still to be concluded, but it is certainly our objective, and one with which I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would concur.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): This has been a memorable St. Andrew's day. Scottish Members have been entertained to lunch by a Scottish brewery, and my right hon. and learned Friend has made a welcome statement.

Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, because it is our intention to ensure maximum employee participation and hence to encourage ownership in Scotland, in the event of unsatisfactory proposals that cannot be reconciled, Scottish companies with employee share participation schemes will also be considered as possible owners of the new independent operations?

Mr. Rifkind: No one wishing to bid for these companies will be prohibited from doing so. We have said that we hope for successful bids from companies with management and employee schemes, and that we hope to be able to give them preference in considering applications. We cannot, however, give any guarantee to that effect, because we must be sure that we can account for the disposal of public assets in a way acceptable to the normal standards of the House.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): The House will recall that the right hon. and learned Gentleman refrained from answering the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) about preserving the public interest in rural areas. Will he tell us what proposals he will put to the House for ensuring that those in rural areas will not suffer as a consequence of privatisation? Or will they be left out of the Government's considerations, as usually happens when they decide to privatise?

Mr. Rifkind: As I told the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), the Labour party in Aberdeen does not seem to believe that privatisation will damage the interests of consumers. Many private sector bus companies operate very successfully in rural areas. The idea that a bus company will stop serving its rural populaces simply because it moves from the state to the private sector does not relate to the experience of the public as a whole.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr. Bennett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I could point out to Opposition Members that I am the secretary of the Back Bench Conservative transport committee.

When considering the privatisation of the Scottish Bus Group, will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind the comments of Opposition Members on privatisation of the National Bus Company some years ago, and the success of deregulation of bus services in Scotland, which has provided more independent operators there since 1986? When Opposition Members talk about predators coming to take over Scottish bus companies, should they not bear in mind the fact that the most successful takeovers of bus companies in this country have been by the Stagecoach group of Perth, which has taken over many companies in the south of England?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is quite correct to say that Opposition Members apply double standards. They seem to believe that it is right in principle for Scottish companies to be able to expand south of the border, but we hear squeals of righteous indignation whenever the reverse applies.

As Opposition Members realise, we are part of a united kingdom and a single economy. Attempts to produce barriers of the kind that one or two of the more emotional of them seem occasionally to suggest would be against the interests of the people of Scotland as a whole.

Several Hon. Members *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Mrs. Ewing.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): When the Secretary of State mentioned the possibility—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Carry on.

Mr. Ewing: Did I mistake what you said, Mr. Speaker? I thought you said, "Mr. Ewing." I should have known, with my record of being called, that that was a mistake.

When the Secretary of State refers to moving the headquarters of any organisation to the centre of activity, he ought to tell the House where it is now proposed to move the headquarters of the Scottish Conservative party. I am advised by the husband of a director of Grampian regional transport that, although the Grampian regional council is bitterly opposed to privatisation, it has entered into negotiations with its employees. Could I squeeze from the Secretary of State an absolute guarantee that he will not interfere in the negotiations? If Grampian regional council considers that it has no option, because of the Government's dogmatic approach, but to go ahead with

[Mr. Ewing]

privatisation, I hope that the Secretary of State will not sell the company to a private company instead of to the employees. Finally, could the Secretary of State tell me when he last travelled on a bus?

Mr. Rifkind: I understand the hon. Gentleman's embarrassment about the position of his party in the Grampian area. Grampian regional council is not legally obliged to privatise——

Mr. Ewing: Not yet.

Mr. Rifkind: The fact is that Grampian regional council, with the support of all political parties, made proposals to privatise its bus company. In doing so, it has responded to the clear wishes of the management and employees of that company. If the hon. Gentleman does not like it, he should at least not misrepresent what is happening.

If a local authority wishes to privatise its public transport company, the statutory position is that it has to apply to the Scottish Office——

Mr. Ewing: No.

Mr. Rifkind: That is what Parliament requires and has insisted upon. We must ensure, as with the disposal of any public asset, that that is done in an appropriate way. If Grampian regional council wishes to privatise its bus company, I have no power to insist that it should sell it to other than those that it chooses. However, I can ensure that the terms under which it seeks to privatise the company are consistent with proper financial responsibility.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I realise that it is St. Andrew's day, not necessarily St. Harry's day. I agree with the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing), on the basis of my conversations with representatives of Grampian region, that a pragmatic decision has been taken and that Grampian is attempting to safeguard the livelihoods of those who are employed in the bus group.

What do the Government mean by "financial assistance"? Has the Secretary of State written a clear sum for next year into his budget? If he has, it would show how willing the Government are to support initiatives that will guarantee jobs for those employees. Is the Secretary of State able to assure me that the road equivalent tariff has not been ruled out for ever for the islands and that it will continue to be considered as a vital element in providing effective transport for the island communities?

Mr. Rifkind: I hope that the Grampian region's pragmatism is infectious and that Strathclyde, Lothian and Tayside will reach similarly pragmatic conclusions. The employees in the bus companies of those regions also seek a similar initiative from the local authorities. I assure the hon. Lady that resources will be provided for those who wish to contemplate employee or management buy-outs.

Mrs. Ewing: How much?

Mr. Rifkind: We shall discuss with those who put forward proposals what their requirements are in order to ensure that they have proper access to advice and assistance. If the hon. Lady consulted Mr. Donald Stewart, who was the Member of Parliament for the Western Isles, he would no doubt tell her what he told me about the road equivalent tariff: that he fully appreciated that it might be undesirable for the islands. It might lead to a reduction in fares on some routes but it would lead to an increase in fares on others. I assume that that is not a policy that the hon. Lady is encouraging me to adopt.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Many hon. Members on this side of the House very much regret the thrust of this privatisation measure and the destruction of a co-ordinating mechanism in Scotland. It will harm the interests of the rural communities and tourism. I do not welcome the Secretary of State's decision on Caledonian MacBrayne; he is confusing ships and routes, particularly in relation to the Clyde ferry service. What guarantee can he provide about safety of operations? What guarantee is there that ships of the proper design will be ordered? The real fear is that privatisation will mean that the part which remains in the public domain will be run down, to the detriment of the people who live in the Western Isles and in the other island communities.

Mr. Rifkind: The rules governing safety apply with equal force, irrespective of whether a vessel is in the private or the public sector. Island communities in other parts of Scotland are well served by the private sector. One thinks of P and O in Orkney and Shetland and of many other island communities where bulk carriers to those islands are provided by the private sector. The hon. Gentleman cannot sensibly reach the conclusion that there is a need for a state-owned company.

However, I acknowledge that, such is the nature of the economy of the Hebridean islands and the size of the population, it will continue to be necessary in the foreseeable future for a significant level of taxpayers' funds to be used to ensure that the islanders have a service, which for them is a lifeline of contact with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): The Secretary of State used snide and mean words about considerable scope for increased value for money and for increased cost-efficiency, but did not praise the savings that have already been achieved by Caledonian MacBrayne. The Secretary of State is having to eat humble pie, but he ought to praise the work of the crews, the employees and the management of Caledonian MacBrayne for the services that they have provided. The Secretary of State's words were based on a half-baked report by the Planning, Industrial and Economic Development Advisers group. Will he undertake to publish the report so that the public and hon. Members can examine it and ask questions about it? Furthermore, how much did the PIEDA group report cost the Exchequer? If the Secretary of State had been looking for cost-efficiency, he would have abandoned this farcical exercise.

Mr. Rifkind: I am very conscious of the fact that in many respects Caledonian MacBrayne has provided a good service to the islands. However, I have received from islanders many comments which suggest that they believe that there is considerable scope for improvement. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman has not hesitated to make clear to Caledonian MacBrayne various ways in which its service could be improved. The hon. Gentleman parrots, "They need more resources." Is he aware that Caledonian MacBrayne has been the recipient of more resources under this Conservative Government than it received under any previous Labour Administration? I am referring not to EC funding but to the support given by the Scottish Office. Caledonian MacBrayne received £3·7 million to support its services in 1979. Today, it receives £6·5 million to support its services. Because of that extra help it has been able to increase its services to island communities quite significantly. During the past five years, the number of passengers carried has increased on virtually all routes, as has the number of commercial vehicles and cars.

We are conscious, however, of several ways in which the service can be improved. For example, Caledonian MacBrayne cannot interchange its crews between routes serving the Hebridean islands and those on the Clyde as they belong to different trade unions and have different restrictive practices. If the hon. Gentleman believes that such restrictive practices are in the interests of the company, I do not believe that his constituents agree with him.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Although I welcome the privatisation of Scottish Buses, will my right hon. and learned Friend pay particular attention to employee participation and the operational requirements of existing companies and their English counterparts? I have in mind Scottish Citylink and its closely integrated operational relationship with the Birmingham-based National Express Group.

Mr. Rifkind: There are many such links, and it is important that, to ensure the best quality of service for consumers, such an integrated approach is encouraged through co-operation between the companies involved.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Can the Secretary of State assure the House that the pension rights of current and past employees of the Scottish Transport Group will not be adversely affected by privatisation?

Mr. Rifkind: I anticipate that any acquisition of a company would involve the continuation of existing rights. There may be areas on which there are later negotiations if any changes are proposed, but it is the normal practice, on acquisition of a company, to inherit pension obligations towards those who work for it.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): The Secretary of State accuses us of employing double standards towards the flogging off of Scottish assets, but is he not in danger of being similarly accused when he gleefully sells off public housing, giving generous discounts to tenants who have occupied homes? It cannot be beyond his wit to devise a scheme under which workers, many of whom have given a lifetime's service to Scottish industry, get generous discounts and an opportunity to buy into the industries in which they work.

Mr. Rifkind: I am delighted to welcome the hon. Gentleman as a convert to the principle of encouraging share ownership among employees and privatisation leading to greater ownership by those who work in companies. The hon. Gentleman has until now been an unqualified opponent of all privatisation. He seems now to be saying that he is in favour of privatisation if it can lead to management-employee buy-outs. He is working in the right direction, and we happily acknowledge that.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I hope that the Secretary of State has noted that two potential recruits for the Scottish Select Committee have sprung up to take part this afternoon. The right hon. and learned Gentleman failed to answer my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing), who asked how often he has travelled on a bus. How often has he struggled on to a bus with a collapsible pushchair, a toddler and an infant? [HON. MEMBERS: "Like Forsyth?"] Indeed. How often have any of his Front Bench colleagues done that?

What will be the consequences of privatisation for the safety and comfort of women and children passengers? Even when a family does have a car, the women and children of the household often have to use public transport because the husband uses the car for work. Did the safety and convenience of women and children passengers feature in the Secretary of State's discussions with Quayle Munro? If so, to what effect?

Mr. Rifkind: I have probably travelled on a bus as often as the Leader of the Opposition in the past six months. Although the other matters which the hon. Lady raised are important, I do not believe that the design of buses and their convenience for passengers with carry cots and other similar objects is likely to be affected significantly by ownership.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on managing to establish cross-party support for privatisation in the form that he has outlined—employee buy-outs and participation—but will he say something about how his plans will affect the growth of competition in the industry, which is vital to improve services for the customer?

Mr. Rifkind: Under existing arrangements, the Scottish Bus Group, which owns all the companies that we are to privatise, if not a monopoly, is in a very dominant position. The replacement of that group by no fewer than 10 or 11 separate companies, each of which will compete with existing private sector companies and public transport companies, including the soon to be privatised PTC in Grampian, will undoubtedly give a substantial boost to real choice and real competition, very much to the benefit of the travelling public.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May we have—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is English."]

Mr. McKelvey: He is a Campbell.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Can we have an assurance that the highway hoodlum, Mr. Souter of Stagecoach, will not be allowed to buy any part of the Scottish Bus Group? Is the Secretary of State for Scotland aware that Mr. Souter dumped nearly 50 buses in the bus station in Keswick, having bought Cumberland Motor Services earlier this year? In effect, he blockaded the town to tourists and cost shopkeepers in my constituency millions of pounds because of his foolish actions, which he took only because the planning authorities refused to give him a planning permission? Is that the kind of man who will be allowed to run the Scottish bus industry in the future?

Mr. Rifkind: If Stagecoach makes proposals for the acquisition of any of these companies, they will be considered in the same way as proposals from any other applicant.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): What evidence does the Secretary of State have for his statement a few moments ago that employees of the Tayside public transport company support privatisation of that company? There is no such support among workers in the Strathtay company. There is simply a recognition that they would prefer a management-employee buy-out to a takeover by a cash-rich predator from the south. Will the Secretary of State help those workers by giving them an assurance that, if their management-employee bid is realistic and commensurate with the value of the public assets involved, he will accept it and not sell out to a higher bidder elsewhere?

Mr. Rifkind: I have already explained the basis on which bids will be considered. I have said that, subject to these general criteria, we want to give preference to employee and management buy-outs. I cannot at the moment anticipate what the difference might be between proposals from the management and employees and from other applicants. We will apply exactly the same criteria as the regional council of which the hon. Gentleman was once a member.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on this announcement. Does he agree that, by breaking down the 3,000 buses into 11 units, he has avoided the predatory pricing which could have arisen? The likely outcome of my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals is an increase in services to rural areas, not a decrease. What plans does he have for privatisation of depots?

Mr. Rifkind: Depots are part of the individual companies and will be privatised as part of the larger privatisation. There were some suggestions from certain quarters about whether it would be desirable to privatise individual depots. We have to bear in mind the likely viability of a depot. It is probably in the interests of employees and all who use these services for us to use the companies to which I have referred as the units on which privatisation is based.

Mr. Bob McTaggart (Glasgow, Central): The Secretary of State has said more than once that it is unacceptable for subsidised routes to be the same as unsubsidised ones. It is often the case, however—especially with the Scottish Bus Group—that subsidised routes are partly the same as unsubsidised ones. That fact has been reported to the traffic commissioners, who have found in favour of the private sector. Can we have an assurance that the same strict criteria will not apply to Caledonian MacBrayne or to any subsidised ferry routes to the islands, bearing in mind the severity of what could happen as a result?

Mr. Rifkind: As the hon. Gentleman knows, with regard to ferries, at Gourock-Dunoon there are two routes that are identical, for all practical purposes. The terminals are a few hundred yards apart on both sides of the route, and that is the point that I was making. I was saying not that there would be a law to prevent that, but that as a matter of policy it seemed an unnecessary use of public money to provide a subsidy so that such a situation could continue. The hon. Gentleman mentioned bus services. I share his view that it is not desirable in principle for a subsidy to be used to enable a company to compete effectively with another that is not subsidised. We shall have to find a way in which such abuses—if they are abuses—can be resolved properly.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Secretary of State accept that his statement, insofar as it concerns the Borders region, will be warmly welcomed, for two reasons? First, Lowland Scottish will be offered for sale as a free-standing entity. Secondly, his comments about the provisions for employee participation will be welcomed. That reflects the broadly based representations that were made by the trade unions, the local authorities and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel). Will the Secretary of State now return to the question of the financial assistance that will be available to management-employee teams? He would help them to prepare their bid better if he gave more explanation about the financial assistance involved.

Mr. Rifkind: I am grateful for that welcome for the terms of my statement. In reply to the second part of the question, we envisage that we may be able to give—although we cannot quantify it—financial assistance to employees and managers who are contemplating a bid. That financial assistance will enable them to obtain professional advice on how to put together a proposal, what is required to make a credible proposal and what the parameters should be, to ensure that they are not disadvantaged through lack of experience in the necessary mechanics for competing with companies or others who may wish to put in a bid.

The second form of assistance will apply to the time when the bids are being considered from the various applicants. We have said, although we cannot yet quantify it, that we shall give preference to management-employee buy-outs. The scale of that preference has yet to be determined.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): When is the first unit of the Scottish Bus Group likely to be privatised? I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his emphasis on employee participation in the privatisation of the group. Does he accept that many regard that emphasis as the acceptable side of devolution in Scotland? As a former convener of Aberdeen municipal transport committee, I congratulate the Socialists of Aberdeen on securing the objective that I failed to achieve—privatisation of that service.

Mr. Rifkind: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's generous compliment to his one-time political opponents. I am sure that he never expected to live to see the day when the Socialists of Aberdeen would join those of other parties in support of privatising the local bus service.

I cannot give a specific timing for these disposals, but the Transport (Scotland) Bill, which provides for the flotation, is to be tabled today and, subject to Parliament's approval, we hope that the necessary legislation will be enacted during the current Session.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Does the Secretary of State recall his weasel words about rural routes at the time of deregulation? Is he aware that many communities in my constituency have lost services, particularly at the weekends and at off-peak times? It is no use for him to rabbit on about route mileage when all the buses are running on the same urban routes, with different operators. We want to talk about rural routes. Can the Secretary of State give any guarantee that services will not be decimated under privatisation as they were at the time of deregulation?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that there are two relevant points here. First, route mileage by bus services in Scotland has gone up since deregulation.

Mr. Foulkes: I said that.

Mr. Rifkind: There is no need for the hon. Gentleman to become apoplectic. The route mileage has gone up, not down. If the hon. Gentleman becomes upset when I agree with him, God knows what he will be like when I disagree with him.

As he knows, Strathclyde regional council is perfectly able to provide public funds to support the continuation of routes that individual companies do not want to provide. The regional council is the appropriate authority to decide whether there is a social need for a bus service on a particular route.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): As far as Caledonian MacBrayne is concerned, will the Secretary of State accept my welcome for 80 per cent. of his statement, which represents retreat? Perhaps in this context we can magnanimously and temporarily forgive him the 20 per cent. that is an ideological figleaf. Will he confirm that his rather patronising remarks about value for money do not suggest a further cut in the CalMac subsidy? Will he accept that a move to Oban should be a matter for debate rather than diktat?

Will the Secretary of State accept that, if the status quo is not an option for buses, an employee buy-out is the best means of common ownership, which will maintain jobs, standards and services? Will he assist that option with substance, rather than mere hope? Will he note our apprehension about predatory bids and will he note that there are plenty of Scottish cowboys, some of them on board stagecoaches?

Mr. Rifkind: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Dispatch Box for his maiden appearance. I am glad that he has used the occasion to welcome the Government's statement—or at least 80 per cent. of it. I hope that that is a useful precedent that he will follow in the weeks and months to come.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the level of subsidy for Caledonian MacBrayne. Naturally, we shall ensure that the subsidy is at the level required to ensure a lifeline to the islands and that the good quality of service that there has been—particularly in the past nine years—is maintained.

As for employee buy-outs, the hon. Gentleman heard what I had to say on the matter and I am glad that he too seems to be joining those who, under certain conditions, are delighted to welcome privatisation.

Prime Minister's Statement

4.26 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday afternoon the Prime Minister abused Question Time to make a statement on the extradition of Father Patrick Ryan. She said:

> "The failure to secure Ryan's arrest is a matter of very grave concern to the Government. It is no use Governments adopting great declarations and commitments about fighting terrorism if they then lack the resolve to put them into practice."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1988; Vol. 142, c. 574.]

That is quite right. We wish that the Prime Minister would follow the example of her own words. The basis of the Prime Minister's claim is that the warrant was sent to Dublin, with additional documentation, on Friday night. We now know from the Crown Prosecution Service that that was not the case. The Prime Minister has misled the House.

The Prime Minister also failed to mention the dilatoriness of the Government in dealing with the Ryan case. Ryan was arrested on 30 June, but the Government failed to serve warrants until 5 September. On 25 November a decision was taken. *[Interruption.]* It is a point of order. The Government obviously do not like being taken to task when the Prime Minister misleads the House.

On 25 November the decision was taken that the Government would put forward demands to the Irish Government, and the Irish Government were expected to do in five minutes what the Belgian Government did not do in five months and for which the British Government were responsible because of the delay in issuing the warrants.

Mr. Speaker: With great respect, I cannot answer questions of that kind.

Mr. McNamara: With great respect, Mr. Speaker, I am coming to a point of order. The matters that I am describing are the background to it. Has the Prime Minister asked you for an opportunity to come to the House to apologise for deliberately misleading it on the issue of the warrants and——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he cannot allege that any hon. Member or right hon. Member has deliberately misled the House. He must withdraw that allegation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] Withdraw the allegation, please—*[Interruption.]* Order. We had this unhappy business yesterday. I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw that allegation, please.

Mr. McNamara: With the greatest respect, Mr. Speaker, before I was interrupted by Conservative Members I was immediately going to withdraw that remark if you had said so, because I respect you and the Chair, which Conservative Members do not always seem to do.

I was going to ask you, Mr. Speaker, when we could expect the Prime Minister to apologise to the House and what arrangements would be made—this is relevant to what happened yesterday—to have the situation recorded properly in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Speaker: What the hon. Gentleman has raised with me is news to me. I am sure that what he has said will be noted on the Government Front Bench, but it is not a matter of order for me.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): Following the precedent set in the case of Patrick McVee, when I gave the Attorney-General my support, has the right hon. and learned Gentleman asked for leave to make a statement on the case of Patrick Ryan? Is not the Attorney-General's proper role to advise the Government and the House, rather than to brief the press through his minions? Would it not be more dignified for proper statements to be made to the House by responsible Ministers, rather than for the Prime Minister to abuse Question Time, so that we can have confirmation of what the Attorney-General said on 14 June—whether it still exists or not—namely, that there was a close and personal relationship between himself and his opposite number in the Republic?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot answer that. Again, it is a matter for the Attorney-General.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I shall take all points of order, on this matter together, because we have a busy day. I call Mr. Benn.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The point of order that I wish to raise arises out of the exchange yesterday, but is totally different in character. The hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates), whom I put on notice that I would raise this matter, said:

> "one of the most wanted terrorists has been let free".

In his question in relation to that case he then said:

> "many. . .still believe that the Irish Republic is a safe haven for some terrorists".

In response—I shall not quote it all—the Prime Minister said:

> "I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that, although the Government of the Republic of Ireland make fine-sounding speeches".—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1988; Vol. 142, c.574-75.]

That question and the assent given to it by the Prime Minister raise two points of order. First, legal proceedings have been taken by the Attorney-General in the case of Father Ryan. As he is abroad, the legal proceedings initiated here have been taken up in Belgium and the Republic. It has been a long practice of the House, which you have rigidly enforced in respect of "Spycatcher", where there was a case in Australia, and in the case of the miners' strike, where miners were coming before the courts, that it was not in order for Members of the House of Commons to confirm or to comment on cases that were sub judice, because the process of bringing the case before the court had begun . I hope——

Mr. Speaker: This case is not yet sub judice.

Mr. Benn: With great respect, Mr. Speaker, I am not asking you to resolve today the case that I am putting to you, but legal proceedings have begun, and in this context they are legal proceedings with a view to bringing somebody before a court. If somebody was wanted by the police in this country and was named in the House as if he had already been convicted, I feel certain that you would interpret that as sub judice.

Secondly, it is clearly a misuse of privilege to use the protection of the House of Commons to make such an allegation. Father Ryan is wanted on a serious charge. It could hardly be more serious. It is in accordance with the practice of the British courts that anyone charged is presumed innocent until convicted. Therefore, when a senior Member of the House says, and it is confirmed by the Prime Minister, that that person is a terrorist, it is impossible from that moment on for that man to have a fair trial. The BBC broadcast those remarks and every newspaper has highlighted them.

The reason why I draw this to your attention, Mr. Speaker—I make no criticism of your conduct of business yesterday—is that the sub judice rule and the self-limitation on privilege are to prevent the House of Commons from becoming a lynch mob. In my submission, yesterday it became a lynch mob, headed by the Prime Minister, whose remarks are bound to prejudice any jury or judge if Father Ryan is brought to this country.

Finally, the reason why this is important is that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said at Question Time, as a result of the Guildford, Woolwich and Birmingham bombings, many people abroad—this was confirmed by what the Prime Minister said yesterday—do not believe that Irish prisoners get justice in British courts.

Mr. Speaker: I advise the right hon. Gentleman that this case is not yet sub judice and I advise the House that every hon. Member must take responsibility for what he says. As I have said before, we have freedom of speech here, but it should be used with great caution. What the right hon. Gentleman has said about any man being innocent until proved guilty is absolutely correct.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that I should call the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates).

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) for the courtesy of telling me that he was going to raise this matter. I used the phrase yesterday solely in the context of my outrage at the fact that that person was not being brought here to face trial. It was not intended to be an intimation of guilt. Strictly, I should have said, "Ryan is the man the security forces most want in connection with serious terrorist offences." I am happy to make that plain.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I believe that yesterday the Prime Minister abused the proceedings of the House in the most disgraceful way imaginable. Essentially, she made a statement during Question Time. I believe that her motive was to grab the headlines from my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who slaughtered the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Government's economic policy. In her abuse of our proceedings the Prime Minister raised the question of the extradition of Father Ryan in the most politically insensitive way imaginable, because that is a matter for the Attorney-General. The Prime Minister also prevented hon. Members from properly questioning the Government on the mess that they have got into on the question of warrants.

My point of order, Mr. Speaker, is to inquire whether, if the Attorney-General asks to make a statement at 7 o'clock this evening, you will look at that sympathetically.

Mr. Speaker: Of course I will.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. As we have a heavy day ahead of us, I ask hon. Gentlemen whether these are points of order that I can deal with, because so far, apart from that of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), they are not really points of order for which I have responsibility.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): This is a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The various points of order have raised what seems to us a potential abuse of Question Time by the Prime Minister, who incorporated into an answer what was, in effect, a statement. As you will recall, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) launched an attack on two Governments—these are serious matters—and the Prime Minister replied in kind. There was no opportunity for Opposition Members to question her, as would be the case if a statement was made.

There is an alternative for you to consider, Mr. Speaker, because Standing Order No. 17 states:

> "No question shall be taken after half-past three o'clock, except . . . questions which have not appeared on the paper, but which are in Mr. Speaker's opinion of an urgent character, and relate either to matters of public importance or to the arrangement of business."

That Standing Order relates to private notice questions, but fits precisely the circumstances that you could use, Mr. Speaker, if, in your opinion, the Prime Minister or any other Minister abused his or her position. Ministers are in a powerful position, because the media report the comments of the Prime Minister carefully and closely. You know, Mr. Speaker, that if the Prime Minister is determined to draw the spotlight away from the economic disaster of the Chancellor and on to something else, she can do that.

As the Executive is accountable to the House, and you, as Mr. Speaker, are the Chairman of the House, it seems to me that by using that Standing Order you could state that because a matter is of an "urgent character" and relates

> "to matters of public importance"

as was clearly the case on this occasion, you could take questions about it after 3.30 pm. Your willingness to be prepared to look at this would be a useful reminder to the Government not to abuse this place as they so badly and blatantly did yesterday.

I realise that the Standing Order gives you that right, but, according to "Erskine May", precedents require you generally to receive an application for a private notice question before 12 o'clock. That is not part of our Standing Orders. It is simply a convention which, if you wished, you could change. I suggest that you reflect on my suggestion, Mr. Speaker, and make a statement—as is customary for the Speaker—so that Mr. Speaker is given a little more elbow room and a little more ability to make a decision when, in his judgment, the Government are seriously abusing this place. We should all be opposed to that.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he has said. The trouble with open questions at Prime Minister's Question Time is that nobody in the House, least of all the Speaker, knows the question that will be asked or the answer that will be given. I cannot divine that sort of thing. It is true that this matter was in the minds of many hon. Members yesterday. I shall certainly reflect on what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. So that we can put into context today's protests by Opposition Members, can you confirm that if, yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition had thought that this was an important subject and had stood up on Question No. 4, you would have called him?

Mr. Speaker: By tradition, when the Leader of the Opposition stands up he is called.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon the Press Association tapes were quoting Government sources as admitting that the warrants issued in respect of Father Ryan were defective. It seems extraordinary that in Dublin the Attorney-General is giving advice very freely indeed. The Attorney-General seems to be briefing the British media very freely. The Prime Minister is criticising the Belgians and the Government of the Republic of Ireland, and it seems that the guilty party is the bungling British Attorney-General, who cannot at this late stage get these warrants right. It is extraordinary that he is not even in the Chamber to listen to these points of order.

Could you arrange for the Attorney-General to report and account to the House on why he has been unable to issue correct warrants in respect of Father Ryan? That clearly lies at the heart of this matter. It is the Attorney-General's responsibility to account for the office that he holds, and he also has a responsibility to the House.

Mr. Speaker: I have not had the advantage of seeing the tapes, but I pick up the hon. Gentleman's general proposition. If it is true—I do not know whether it is—that the press has been briefed, in my judgment the House should also be briefed.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): May I proffer a suggestion, Mr. Speaker, which you may care to think about overnight on the matter of warrants and the sub judice rule? If the man has been accused and charged in this country, of course, the sub judice rule applies. A warrant is issued when a person is not within the jurisdiction of the court. If, after that, at any time he comes into the jurisdiction of the court he becomes the subject matter of the charge to which the warrant relates. Would it not be sensible, when you review these matters—I do not require an answer today, but perhaps a statement could be made—*[Interruption.]* I apologise for the bad manners of Conservative Members. When you, Mr. Speaker, and those who advise you have had time to consider my suggestion, perhaps a statement could be made, or the rules slightly changed so that they cover either the moment when the man is charged or when a warrant is issued against him in this country.

Mr. Speaker: A change in the sub judice rule would be a matter for the House, but if the hon. Gentleman thinks through what he and other hon. Members have been saying, he may feel that the House would wish further to debate the whole matter. At the moment the matter is not sub judice.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point is based on what you said a few moments ago. We appreciate your comment that if the press has been briefed the House should be briefed and, as you would expect, we go along with that. The Leader of the House is in the Chamber and the support that you will get from the Government will perhaps be demonstrated by the way in which they respond to the clear injunction from you that there should be a statement. May I, through you, ask the Leader of the House if he will talk to his colleagues to ensure that we have a statement at 7 o'clock?

Mr. Speaker: Let us leave that matter, because I have a statement to make.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Proceedings of the House

Mr. Speaker: I have been reflecting upon yesterday's debate on the Queen's Speech. It has been represented to me by several right hon. and hon. Members that there was an attempt to disrupt the opening speeches by co-ordinated interruptions. I hope that that was not the case and that it will never be the case. I entirely accept that there should be cut and thrust in debate in the House and, on occasions, interventions, but not organised interruptions, which are a very different matter. Furthermore, I hope that personal allegations against hon. Members will not be raised again in the way that they were raised yesterday.

The House, in its wisdom, long ago laid down a proper procedure for pursuing complaints about these matters. In relation to what was alleged yesterday, and in order to clear up the matter without any equivocation, perhaps it would be right for me to read to the House once again what was said yesterday, because the letter read out by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was not addressed to me. It was a letter to him, not to me.

The hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) drew attention to what he thought had been a "fiddling of the record". He asked me to confirm

"that the record had in fact been changed"

and that I had apologised. The hon. Gentleman said:

> "The assurance that I now seek from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is"

whether it was or not. I said:

> "I subsequently looked into the matter and I had an assurance from the Editor of *Hansard* that no alteration was made at the specific request of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). It was a mistake in the *Hansard* reporting."

I went on to confirm:

> "The mistake was not the mistake of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1988; Vol. 142, c. 583.]

I hope that that puts the matter into its proper perspective.

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): I am glad to have an opportunity of accepting unreservedly your guidance and ruling about the manner in which personal allegations should be made in the House.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it be in any way impertinent to ask you, as you have understandably dealt very toughly and quickly with some of us on other matters, why yesterday, knowing the background, and with all the information that was available to you, you did not call to order the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Home Secretary? Some of us feel that if we had tried to do what the Home Secretary's PPS did we would have been shut up, with short shrift, and rightly, by you, Mr. Speaker. Why did that not happen yesterday?

Mr. Speaker: I am glad to have an opportunity to explain that. The matter that the hon. Gentleman raised took place a month ago. Good though my memory is, I did not immediately recollect it or appreciate what he was saying until later, when he made the allegation. I then recollected what had happened and I made the comments that are clearly on the record in *Hansard*.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I thank you for the clarification and the statement that you have made to the House, following, as you have said, representations made to you? Would it not have been better if the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) had made a proper statement to the House and cleared up this matter? Many of us feel that his conduct yesterday was outrageous. His standing has gone down in the minds of many people because of the way in which he conducted himself. While he refuses completely to withdraw his allegation, we can only hold him in contempt.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I ask for your guidance, because this is a serious matter. I hope that it is not being suggested that it is not possible, in a very important debate, for hon. Members on both sides of the House politely to ask an Opposition or Government spokesmen to give way—*[Interruption.]* May I make my point?—so that they can make an intervention. We all accept that organised barracking is wrong, and I was not aware that there had been such a thing by those on the Government Benches. *[Interruption.]* I am as entitled as anybody else to make my point.

This morning I read in *Hansard* the debates on the Queen's Speech for the past 20 years, and on every one of those occasions Opposition Front Bench spokesmen were prepared to give way on a number of occasions and discuss what they would do if they were in government. Yesterday the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) gave way on only two occasions and refused to give way to two of my hon. Friends.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have made a statement on this matter in order to clear it up. I do not think that we want to take it any further, except to say that we have a long tradition in the House that we resolve our disagreements by argument, not by any form of disruption, and I hope that that will always be the case.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No, I shall not hear any more points of order on this matter.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: If it is a different point of order, I will hear it.

Mr. Ewing: It is not a different point of order. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down!"] No, I will not sit down, and I will not take lectures on morality from hon. Members who conduct themselves in the way that the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) has done. The reputation and integrity of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) have been besmirched, and I say to you quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that you have a responsibility to protect that reputation. I do not care about myself, but I care a great deal about the way in which the affairs of the House are conducted. I have a great love for the House of Commons, and I care a great deal about the image of the House in the country, and what happened yesterday at the behest of the hon. Member for Suffolk, South has done immeasurable damage to the standing of the House of Commons.

I am worried about two matters. First, my understanding—I apologise in advance if this is not true—is that the letter from the Editor of *Hansard* to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East was copied and sent to you. If that is true, it gives me the clear impression that you were not made aware of the contents of that letter and therefore you were caught in the position that you were yesterday, so there has been some breakdown.

The second point is that in successive news bulletins by the BBC yesterday information was given that the speech to be made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East was to be disrupted. That information was given out by the Government. My hon. Friends have said that the apology from the hon. Member for Suffolk, South is insufficient. We are asking too much from the hon. Gentleman. Having seen his conduct yesterday, I do not believe that he has the ability or the standing to apologise properly. I am quite content to leave him in the gutter, where he belongs.

Mr. Speaker: I have one final word to say on this matter, in answer to what the hon. Gentleman has said. I received a copy of that letter about a month ago. It was addressed to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and not to me. I hope the House will accept that it is not my practice—nor, I hope, the practice of other hon. Members—to disclose letters addressed to other hon. Members.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The month is the point.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that the House is grateful to you for outlining the rules on this matter, and I am sure also that the House will take those rules to heart. In view of the significance of the letter from the Editor of *Hansard* to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), and the fact that you now have a copy of that letter and that it is rather central to the remarks made yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), would it not be helpful to the House if that letter were placed in the official record, and perhaps you could make arrangements to do that?

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to read the letter out. It was not addressed to me.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a matter that reflects on the integrity of the Chair. *Hansard* of yesterday shows that you asked the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) to withdraw his allegation against my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). The hon. Member for Suffolk, South said:

> "I gladly withdraw it, Mr. Speaker, if we have an assurance that no. . .Opposition Member will seek to tamper with today's record."

You, Mr. Speaker, said:

> "Order. No qualification please. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw the allegation absolutely."

The hon. Member for Suffolk, South said:

> "I withdraw the specific allegation that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East falsified the record."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1988; Vol. 142, c. 584.]

I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that that was a sheer defiance of your ruling. It is part of our rules that we do not cast aspersions on individuals, nor on hon. Members in general.

The public in general, not only in this country, but internationally, look to *Hansard* for an accurate record of our proceedings, and look to *Hansard* to understand our

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

constitution and to understand the honour of Members. The fact that the hon. Member for Suffolk, South refused to withdraw such an unfounded and unwarranted allegation is a matter of great honour. He would do himself a great deal of credit, and it would reflect credit on the House of Commons, if you gave him one last opportunity to withdraw the allegation and apologise for this disgraceful calumny.

Mr. Yeo *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I accepted the hon. Gentleman's withdrawal yesterday. Is he seeking to say something more?

Mr. Yeo: I simply wanted to draw attention to the fact that yesterday I said:

> "I withdraw the specific allegation that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East falsified the record."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1988; Vol. 142, c. 584.]

Today I have confirmed that I accept your ruling about the manner in which personal allegations should be made. A great deal of trouble would have been saved had the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East copied to me the letter that he received from the Editor of the *Official Report*.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that we should have any re-run of this matter.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It might be better if the House were reminded of what has happened on this matter over a long period. In the debate that my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) opened and concluded so brilliantly, to the disturbance of Conservative Members, he was asked, in an intervention, about certain matters. He replied that there was no such commitment, or that there were no such commitments. The difference was immaterial, as hon. Members will see if they look at the record. The hon. Member, as I am obliged to call him by the traditions of the House, for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) two days later asserted, without any justification, or without approaching my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East——

Mr. Yeo: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dobson: —had gone to the *Official Report* and requested a change in the words, and he said that he did not blame the Editor of the *Official Report* or the Reporters, who might not be entirely appreciative of the significance of the change. So he apparently knew what my hon. Friend had done, and knew that the *Hansard* reporters were not responsible. That was what he said. You—I regret to say this, Mr. Speaker—apparently without checking with my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East, gave the impression that he had in some way been party to what had happened.

Following that, very properly, the Editor of *Hansard* wrote and apologised to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East for what had happened and took the entire responsibility for what had gone wrong on his shoulders and said that it was one of the *Hansard* staff who had got it wrong. If anyone had to set the record straight, clearly it was not my hon. Friend.

Yesterday, the hon. Member for Suffolk, South raised this matter again and wholly falsely asserted that my hon. Friend had brought pressure to bear to falsify the record. Then he said that he had been fiddling the record and only after pressure from Opposition Members did you, Mr. Speaker, get him to make his partial withdrawal. We think that it is quite unsatisfactory for the House to be left in that position and that an apology from the hon. Gentleman would be proper.

Reverting to the beginning of your statement, Mr. Speaker, when you said that you did not like barracking and organised interruptions, you may recall that the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) raised a point of order about this letter. About half a minute later, when you were otherwise engaged, the Tory Chief Whip urged him to try to have another go at you and raise the point of order again. He is the source of all this trouble. The Tory Chief Whip is the person who organises this, and we could do with an apology from both of them.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I consider that to be a most disgraceful intervention by the hon. Gentleman. This is an important matter and I fully support the way in which you have sought to deal with this disagreeable incident. I fully support what you have done.

It seems to me that the letter from the Editor of *Hansard* to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) set out the facts. I therefore wonder whether you might consider what my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) said and see to it that the letter is published in the *Official Report*. That would then put an end to the matter.

Mr. Speaker: The letter was not addressed to me.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: We must now move on. The hon. Gentleman puts in jeopardy his hon. Friends who wish to speak in the next debate.

Mr. Rooker: This is a different point of order, Mr. Speaker, which is intended to be helpful. We have already spent a considerable amount of time on an important issue. As no hon. Member has made a personal statement, everyone else is fully entitled to raise the issue day after day. With respect, I put it to Conservative Front-Bench Members that they should suggest that the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) makes a personal statement. That could not be questioned. When that is done, that will be the end of the matter.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has heard that.

Ballot for Notices of Motions for Friday 16 December

The Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. John Watts
Mr. Nicholas Bennett
Mr. Nicholas Bennett.

Mr. Speaker: I think that we should have a redraw. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): I think that you may have misread the names, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps it was Nicholas Baker?

Mr. Speaker: It looks like Nicholas Bennett to me. I think that we should have a redraw for the final name. It is Mr. Kenneth Hind.

Later——

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You said that you would redraw the ballot, but all you did was redraw the third name. You left in the name of the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett), who had put in two names and had virtually cheated by doing so. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] I withdraw the phrase "virtually cheated".

If an hon. Member votes twice, his vote is cancelled. Whether by accident or not, the hon. Gentleman had two names in the ballot and, according to that ballot, he still has second place. That cannot be right. As you said that the ballot should be redrawn, the whole ballot should be redrawn.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): I have just had a word with the Clerks and discovered that, inadvertently, it was the same book that was in the Lobby. I was not aware of that and therefore apologise. I certainly had no intention of cheating and, if the House thinks that I should not have second place, I should be happy for you to draw the names again.

Mr. Speaker: I shall draw one more.

Mr. Cohen *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The final name is Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

BILLS PRESENTED

ELECTRICITY BILL

Mr. Secretary Parkinson, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary Walker, Mr. Secretary Fowler, Mr. Secretary Ridley, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Channon, Mr. Tony Newton, Mr. Peter Morrison and Mr. Michael Spicer, presented a Bill to provide for the appointment and functions of a Director General of Electricity Supply and of consumers' committees for the electricity supply industry; to make new provision with respect to the supply of electricity through electric lines and the generation and transmission of electricity for such supply; to abolish the Electricity Consumers' Council and the Consultative Councils established under the Electricity Act 1947; to provide for the vesting of the property, rights and liabilities of the Electricity Boards and the Electricity Council in companies nominated by the Secretary of State and the subsequent dissolution of those Boards and that Council; to provide for the giving of financial assistance in connection with the storage and reprocessing of nuclear fuel, the treatment, storage and disposal of radioactive waste and the decommissioning of nuclear installations; to amend the Rights of Entry (Gas and Electricity Boards) Act 1954 and the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed [Bill 4].

OFFICIAL SECRETS BILL

Mr. Secretary Hurd, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Secretary Younger, Mr. Secretary King, Mr. Secretary Rifkind and Mr. John Patten, presented a Bill to replace section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 by provisions protecting more limited classes of official information: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed [Bill 9].

TRANSPORT (SCOTLAND) BILL

Mr. Secretary Rifkind, supported by Mr. Secretary Channon, Mr. Norman Lamont, Mr. Ian Lang and Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, presented a Bill to make provision for the transfer to the private sector of the operations of the Scottish Transport Group, other than its shipping operations; for the transfer of its shipping operations to the Secretary of State; to provide for the dissolution of the Group; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed [Bill 10].

EMPLOYMENT BILL

Mr. Secretary Fowler, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary Walker, Mr. Secretary King, Mr. Secretary Baker, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Tony Newton and Mr. John Cope, presented a Bill to amend the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 in pursuance of the Directive of the Council of the European Communities, dated 9th February 1976, (No. 76/207/EEC) on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions; to repeal or amend prohibitions or requirements relating to the employment of young persons and other categories of employees; to make other amendments of the law relating to employment; to repeal section 1(1) (a) of the Celluloid and Cinematograph Film Act 1922; to dissolve the Training Commission; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed [Bill 8].

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Safety at Work Regulations) (Non-UK Ships) Regulations 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Agriculture Improvement (Variation) (No. 3) Scheme 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 2066) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Customs Duties (ECSC) (Amendment No. 3) Order 1988 (S.I., 1988, No. 2055) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. John. M. Taylor.]*

Orders of the Day

Petroleum Royalties (Relief) and Continental Shelf Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

5.7 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy (Mr. Peter Morrison): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I begin by welcoming the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) to the Opposition Front Bench. I congratulate him on his appointment. I know that he has a strong personal interest in North sea oil and gas activities, and the House will be more than aware that he has a strong constituency interest. Indeed, over the past 25 years, Aberdeen has played a vital part in the development of our North sea oil activities, which has not always been an easy task.

The Bill is short, and it has two specific purposes. Its first purpose is to end royalties for new fields in the southern basin of the North sea as well as onshore. That will implement the commitment that was given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement. The Bill's second purpose is to implement the agreement that the United Kingdom Government reached with the Republic of Ireland on the determination of the continental shelf.

Perhaps it would be sensible to put the Bill in the context of the North sea generally before I explain it in detail. It is fair to say that, when I came into office with my right hon. and hon. Friends 18 months ago, the situation in the North sea was a little bleak, and had been so for a while. That had been caused by a massive and entirely unpredicted fall in the price of oil. I am happy to say that the picture now is much better. I can paint an upbeat and optimistic picture, but it is not as upbeat and optimistic as I would like.

The House will recall what happened on the evening of 6 July. That was the night of the Piper Alpha disaster. When I went to Aberdeen in the early hours of 7 July, I was met by a stunned city and stunned citizens. I think that hon. Members in all parts of the House and the entire industry remain deeply upset by a disaster of such major proportions. Since then, the aim of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and myself has been to ensure that everything is done to prevent such an accident in future. My right hon. Friend has said many times, as have I, that all the information available should be made public. As for the future, if there are lessons to be learned, they should be learned properly. Hence, immediately after 6 July, the technical investigation was set up by my right hon. Friend, to be carried out by the safety directorate of my Department. Its task was to produce an early report on what had happened. The House will know that the interim report was published on 29 September.

Within a week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that there would be a public inquiry under the chairmanship of Lord Cullen, with wide terms of reference. That inquiry will start on 19 January 1989 in Aberdeen. Before then, the technical investigation team will produce a further report, which will be made available to Lord Cullen. At the same time, the work of the safety directorate continues. The House will know that the information which has been obtained has already led to the directorate asking that the industry should consider better ways to improve the pipeline isolation systems. At the time of the publication of the interim report, we asked the industry to examine six further areas in the light of what we had learnt.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I wish to say publicly that I appreciate the work that has been done by the Minister of State and the Secretary of State in setting up the technical inquiry and the Cullen inquiry. The Cullen inquiry has begun in a way that shows that it will be an open and public hearing.

I ask the Minister to comment on the great unhappiness felt by those involved in the oil industry throughout the United Kingdom, and not in Aberdeen alone, about the way in which the debris from the Piper Alpha platform has been dealt with following the disaster. Many bodies are still missing. It is believed that there are technical lessons to be learned on the sea bed. Has the Minister reviewed his position on collapsing the platform on the sea bed?

Mr. Morrison: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, as is my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, for his remarks about our conduct since the disaster early in July. Secondly, if he will bear with me on the abandonment of the Piper Alpha platform and the evidence that is currently below the sea, I shall deal with those matters if, with the leave of the House, I have the opportunity to reply at the end of the debate.

These are technical matters and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend and I, along with the entire Department, have examined them extremely carefully. We have consulted outside experts. I think that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased that we have consulted other interests, especially the Scottish fishermen. He may be aware that I have had a meeting with the Scottish fishermen. There are important implications, and a decision will not be taken easily. If it is helpful to the hon. Gentleman and the House, I shall deal specifically with these matters at the end of the debate.

The areas covered by the interim report produced by the technical investigation team were permit-to-work systems, automatic initiation of fire-fighting systems, operability of life rafts, evacuation routes, the integrity of emergency systems and venting and explosions. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that safety has always been of paramount importance. That remains the Government's view. It is wrong to say that we are seeking to approach perfection when we examine safety. We do not believe that there is safety perfection, because that would imply that there is nothing more to do. I hope that no hon. Member will take that view.

As I have said, we shall want to learn everything that we can from the public inquiry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that, if Lord Cullen's report identifies improvements that could be made to the safety regime, the recommendations will be considered extremely seriously.

Piper Alpha must remain in our minds. Even so, it would be wrong not to recognise that the story of the North sea over the past 25 years has been one of tremendous success for the United Kingdom. It has come about thanks to the superb managerial and technical achievements of the international oil industry. It is a story of success, however, for everyone who has been involved. Too few of our constituents—I speak of those of us who represent constituencies that are not close to the North sea or that do not have a specific oil interest—understand what has been achieved and appreciate the enormous input of North sea oil activities to the United Kingdom as a whole. Even the optimists of 25 years ago could not have dreamt that we would come so far.

We have now entered a new phase. The largest discoveries have probably been made, and oil prices continue to fluctuate. Even so, the North sea oil industry continues to be both vigorous and successful. Given the circumstances, I believe that the industry is more vigorous now than it has ever been. I shall recite one or two facts to demonstrate what has been happening this year.

We in the Department have approved 24 projects so far. That is new investment of about £3·1 billion. It is the largest number of project approvals in any one year. In 1987, 13 projects were approved, amounting to new investment of £1·2 billion. These figures tell us that we are almost £2 billion ahead in terms of new investment. A further 13 projects are currently under discussion.

At the same time, drilling activity is high. So far this year, 121 exploration and appraisal wells have been started. That is a two-thirds improvement over the equivalent period last year. Four discoveries have been made, and a further five announcements have been made on tests on structures adjacent to existing finds. In addition, 135 development wells have been started, against 100 over the first nine months of 1987. That is only 10 short of the record year of 1985. These figures are a tribute to the initiative and determination of the oil industry—and when I say that, I mean everyone involved in it. It demonstrates their great adaptability and will to introduce new technology. It is those traits which lead me to believe that the North sea oil and gas industry has a continuing and exciting future.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): There is some confusion, at least among Conservative Members, as a result of the Committee deliberations in June on the Finance Bill, as it then was. Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that the oil allowance of 125,000 tonnes per chargeable period is fiscal neutrality? He will be aware that the producers' argument is that that figure is too low. His comments on these matters will help the development of the debate.

Mr. Morrison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for potentially drawing me out of order. However, he anticipates remarks that I was about to make about the package as a whole—because this is part of a package, as my hon. Friend rightly said.

The purpose of the Bill is to contribute to the aim that I have outlined—to continue to create the right atmosphere so that further exploration and development can proceed. It has always been the Government's policy to keep the North sea fiscal regime under review and to make changes where that was desirable to ensure that the climate continues to be favourable to such initiatives. The abolition of royalty for new fields in the northern basin in 1983 was an example of that policy.

The Bill represents a further step in the same direction. There were a number of significant gas prospects in the southern basin of the North sea which were economic before tax, but which could have been inhibited by the fiscal regime. The greatest potential obstacle to their development was royalty, because its impact is relatively insensitive to field economics.

As I have said, the ending of royalty for new fields in the southern basin formed part of a package—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) referred—of changes in the North sea fiscal regime which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget statement. Taken as a whole over the lives of the fields concerned, that change is expected to be revenue-neutral.

It would not be wholly appropriate for me to go into great detail about the discussions in Committee stage on the Finance Bill earlier this year. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke and other hon. Friends will have noticed that the original proposal was for an oil tax allowance of just 100,000 tonnes. After we had listened very carefully to the arguments from the oil industry and examined new evidence presented to us, that figure was increased to 125,000 tonnes. As I have said, that is intended to be revenue-neutral, and that is the intention of the new figure of 125,000 tonnes.

If the industry responds positively to the package, there is a real prospect that most, if not all, of Britain's gas requirements for the 1990s can be found from our own resources. In fact, there is already evidence that the industry is responding. As the House will know, earlier this year Hamilton Brothers announced a decision directly as a result of the Government's intention to abolish royalties in the southern basin to develop the Ravenspurn North field. That development represents an investment of £600 million in 1·25 trillion cu ft of gas reserves which would not otherwise have taken place.

The Bill will also end royalties for new onshore fields. That will provide a useful encouragement to onshore development. That aspect was also foreshadowed by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his Budget. While talking about onshore exploration, I want to raise another point. I am more than aware that other difficulties must be overcome to promote onshore exploration and development. Of course it is right that local authorities are and should be concerned about what is involved in onshore developments. However, it is also of the greatest importance that local debate should be well informed and should not be misled by the exaggerated fears and anxieties that sometimes arise.

As those hon. Members who have had the opportunity to visit British Petroleum's Wytch Farm development will know, a well run oilfield onshore can be a perfectly acceptable neighbour as far as environmental impact is concerned. One of our oldest onshore oilfields at Dukes Woods near Eakring, Newark has been recognised as an ideal environment for wild orchids, moths and butterflies which are rare in Nottinghamshire. In 1972, the area was notified as a site of special scientific interest and, through the collaboration of the industry and the Nottingham Trust for Conservation, the well sites have been preserved as a nature trail. I mention that because of the irony that, if the same development were proposed today, it would no doubt be the subject of great concern on environmental grounds.

The other elements of the package of the North sea fiscal changes which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in his Budget statement have already been approved by the House and implemented through the

[Mr. Morrison]

Finance (No. 2) Act 1988. As Opposition Members will recall, in Committee on the Finance Bill the then Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), said that he believed that the Government were right in principle to remove the penalty of royalties.

We must ensure that the momentum to which I have referred is maintained. It is no exaggeration to claim that the United Kingdom is becoming the offshore oil capital of the world. The North sea has created nearly 30,000 offshore jobs, and, according to the most recent reports that I can find, some 75,000 onshore jobs in Scotland alone. That represents a valuable part of our industrial base, which we must do our utmost to sustain.

Clause 1 will exempt new fields in the southern basin and on shore from royalties as from 1 July this year. Clause 2 is needed only to ensure that the similar exemption already granted for new fields elsewhere in the North sea will apply to licences issued in the 11th round and subsequently.

The Bill's second purpose, to which I referred earlier, is to enable the United Kingdom to implement the agreement negotiated recently with the Irish Republic on the delimitation of the continental shelf. That is dealt with in clause 3. The agreement resolves an issue which has been outstanding for 25 years. Agreeing boundaries will open up new opportunities for the oil and supply industries if exploration in the areas should prove successful. I hope that all hon. Members will agree that that represents an important step forward. As the House will be aware, copies of the agreement have been available in the Library since 8 November, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary informed the House that he had signed the agreement.

I want to explain a little more about the agreement. At present, we have powers to designate areas for offshore activity on our continental shelf, but we do not have powers to de-designate, and those are what the Bill is taking. When I was first told that, I must admit that it did not mean very much to me, and I suspect that it does not mean all that much to my hon. Friends or to Opposition Members. Let me try to make it a little clearer. There are areas off the west coast of Scotland which in the past have been claimed by both sides. After considerable negotiation, it has been agreed that the Republic of Ireland should give up some of its claim and so should we. However, we cannot give effect to that, because we do not have the necessary powers. That is the purpose of this small clause: it covers that agreement and that agreement alone. I assure the House that it would not permit the Government to do anything similar elsewhere. As the House will see, the Bill refers specifically to the agreement signed in Dublin on 7 November—no more and no less.

Some hon. Members may believe that the territory of Northern Ireland is being given up as part of the agreement. I give a categorical assurance that that is not so. The line in the north-west starts at latitude 55·28 north and longitude 6·45 west. That is well to the west of any conceivable boundary between the continental shelf of Northern Ireland and that of the Irish Republic.

In July this year, I invited applications for further offshore licences in the 11th round. Two hundred and twelve blocks are on offer, which makes it the biggest round for many years. One may ask why we have done this when the industry is facing such severe problems due to the low oil price. The answer is simply that there is an underlying buoyancy in the industry's outlook. The licences we are offering now will be the basis for the oil production that we need in the 21st century. No one in the industry doubts that there is a long-term future. That is why there is enthusiasm in the industry for the 11th round. I detect that that enthusiasm is spread among all sections of the industry. Our proposals are geared to interest every type of company—majors and independents alike.

There are further reasons for expecting the round to be successful. First, we have included in the 11th round some blocks which have never before been licensed in areas which are known to be of widespread interest. Secondly, exploration techniques have shown remarkable advances in the past five to ten years. Oil companies can now home in on small accumulations of oil and gas which previously went unnoticed. Thirdly, I have already referred to the industry's adaptability and willingness to introduce new technologies. That augurs well for the future prosperity of the industry and puts it in a strong position to compete for the licences that we are offering.

I know that even now companies are working hard on the proposals that they are due to put to us on 7 or 8 February, and I look forward eagerly to receiving their proposals.

The Bill may appear to be a small one, and, taken alone, it certainly is, but it is part of a large and important segment of Great Britain. Measures such as this will be needed to maintain the right climate for development. Without them, the success of the North sea would never have been possible. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.31 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): First, I thank the Minister for his kind opening remarks. I hope only that the attendance in the debate has nothing to do with my debut on the Front Bench—perhaps hon. Members would rather read what I have to say than listen to it.

I also thank the Minister for his kind remarks about Aberdeen. I represent Aberdeen, South, and the city of Aberdeen, the Grampian region and north-east Scotland have made a very significant contribution to the success which Britain enjoys in its oil industry. Of course, we should not forget that other regions send their workers there. Many of the workers in the oil industry are migrant workers from Glasgow, Dundee—my home town—Tyneside and Teesside. Nor should we forget the contribution of the southern sector by the people in and around east Anglia. It is a national contribution to a national asset. I thank the Minister for his kind remarks.

The Bill is very specific in its intention, but, as the Minister has already pointed out, it provides us with a welcome opportunity to debate the offshore oil and gas industry. Such opportunities do not occur often. Next year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of operations in the North sea. As the Minister has said, those years have seen a tremendous leap forward in technology and the ability to exploit further and improve on our oil and gas reserves. The oil industry has made an enormous contribution to the wealth of the country, and all those involved in that tremendous achievement are to be congratulated.

Oil and gas are extremely important to the economy. We produce about 2·5 million barrels of oil and gas a day, which is a tremendous boost to our balance of payments. We export 1 million barrels a day and save on imports to the tune of 1·5 million barrels a day. All in all, at current prices that is a benefit to the trade balance of £1 billion per month—a significant achievement on anyone's terms. It is a tragedy for the country that the positive input that we have enjoyed for a number of years is wasted on what Opposition Members regard as failed economic policies which rely more on dogma than economic reality.

Mr. Hunter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Doran: No, I shall not give way on that point.

We used to get much more benefit from North sea oil and gas. As the Minister said, the price of oil collapsed in 1986. It is interesting to examine the position since then, and what the collapse meant for our economic position.

According to the Brown Book—the Department's annual statistics on oil and gas development—in 1985 the GNP arising within the oil and gas sector was £15·1 billion. That is a huge amount of money. The provisional figures for 1987, reported in the 1988 edition of the Brown Book, was £8·2 billion—a huge reduction. Tax and royalty revenues have gone down from the 1984-85 figure of just over £12 billion to the 1987-88 provisional figure of £4·7 billion—a significant drop. That is a direct result of the massive drop in the oil price in 1986. Since then, the oil price has fluctuated between just under $10 a barrel and about $20 a barrel. Today, it is just over $14 a barrel. Early hopes that this week's OPEC agreement would result in a substantial increase in the oil price have not been borne out. For understandable reasons, the markets have been cautious on pricing.

Currently, there are two major preoccupations in the oil industry—price and safety. I shall return to the question of safety. In this country, price has been left purely to market forces. The market is particularly sensitive, and that has hit my area of north-east Scotland. The oil price rises or falls in response to a whole range of factors, the most important of which is the level of production. It is quite clear that there is gross over-production and that there is a glut of oil on the world market.

Far from the controlled production levels and price stability sought by the OPEC countries, which would be of tremendous benefit to those countries and to our own industry, there is an international free-for-all on the world oil market. That has led directly to a fall in income in the United Kingdom and in other countries and to a severe depression in activity in the United Kingdom sector of the continental shelf. Only in the past year has there been a real recovery in activity. There has been an improvement in investment, but it is very cautious investment, certainly not at the levels expected in 1984 and 1985.

Britain and its oil industry have a vested interest in price stability, which would allow planned investment programmes and more planned depletion rates of existing fields and the development of new ones. Yet the Government have chosen to take no part in influencing the oil price. They are prepared to rely on market forces alone, and in doing so they isolate themselves from international discussion. None of us can say what influence the Government would have had had they been prepared to do what the Norwegian Government have done—simply to talk to OPEC and try to reach some agreement on production. None of us can say that that would have added to price stability, given the other international factors, but some sense needs to be brought into world oil markets, and the United Kingdom, as a major and influential producer, should be part of that process.

Of course, the price of oil and gas is not just the cost of getting it out of the ground or the cost per barrel. Overshadowing all North sea activity at the moment is the Piper Alpha tragedy. I thank the Minister for his comments and for his recognition of the severe and shocking effect of that disaster, particularly on the city of Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) will probably comment on the disaster later in the debate.

One hundred and sixty-seven men lost their lives in the Piper Alpha tragedy, which sent shock waves through the whole industry. Safety is now right at the top of the agenda. I never have a meeting with oil companies in which safety is not the major issue under discussion.

I commend the Secretary of State, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) commended the Minister, on the speed with which the Government reacted to the disaster. I know that, in the early hours of 7 July, the Minister immediately went to Aberdeen to be present at the command centre to lend whatever assistance he and his Department could offer. I commend them for the speed with which the judicial inquiry has been instructed. Hopefully, the inquiry under Lord Cullen will pinpoint the precise causes of the tragedy and make recommendations to prevent future occurrences.

It is important, however, that the Government do not shy away from making improvements in safety, where they are obviously required, now rather than waiting until Lord Cullen has reported. Parliamentary answers and the replies to the numerous letters that I have written to the Minister and to the Secretary of State suggest that to a certain extent they are hiding behind Lord Cullen and that everything is frozen until he has reported. We need, as emphatically as possible, to make the point that the biggest single contribution to safety in the North sea would be the establishment of a single, independent agency responsible for all safety matters. That was recommended by the Burgoyne committee in 1981, but despite the Secretary of State's public statements the Government have singularly failed to appoint that single agency.

There is still a multiplicity of agencies responsible for safety in the North sea. The petroleum engineering division, a section of the Department of Energy, is responsible for health and safety aspects, and the pipelines inspectorate is responsible for the integrity of pipelines. It is another section of the Department of Energy, but the two operate separately and distinctly, with quite different areas of responsibility.

There are approved certifying authorities—private companies are responsible for the integrity of platforms; the Department of Transport is responsible for fire-fighting and safety equipment and for supply boats; and the Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for helicopters. Where is the unity in that system? There is none. The Secretary of State was at pains to point out in his numerous interviews immediately following the Piper Alpha disaster that all of the recommendtions of the Burgoyne committee had been implemented, but that is not the case. The multiplicity of agencies is severely hampering the establishment of a proper safety system in the North sea.

[Mr. Doran]

In case hon. Members think that this is an academic argument about bureaucracies, I remind them of what was said in the technical report prepared by Mr. James Petrie of the Department of Energy. I commend him for the content of and the speed with which his report was produced. It confirms that the scale of death and destruction on the Piper Alpha platform was the result of ruptures in high-pressure gas pipelines. Burning gas was released on to the platform like a blowtorch, destroying everythind in its path. The integrity of the pipeline is the responsibility of the pipelines inspectorate, while the integrity of the platform is the responsibility of the certifying authority. No one has assumed responsibility for the interface between the pipeline and the platform, or, for example, considered what would be the effect of a breach of a pipeline.

That is not a novel thought. The Government are well aware of the problem, because the Burgoyne committee, way back in 1981, said in paragraph 5.64 of its report:

> "One of the 'grey' areas referred to above is the overlap in responsibility between the PED and the certifying authorities in respect of the pipeline riser and other pipeline equipment on the installation. Although forming an essential part of the pipeline system it clearly has a bearing on the integrity of the installation."

That was in 1981, and we know what happened on the Piper Alpha in 1988. That tragedy was a direct consequence of the failure to deal with that grey area.

The Department of Energy, through the Minister, has taken one positive step and announced a proces of consultation with the industry on fitting emergency shutdown valves. The failure to install such valves in Piper Alpha led to the scale of death and destruction. Will the Minister tell the House if and when he intends to introduce regulations to make the installation of emergency shutdown valves mandatory on all high-pressure gas and oil pipelines in the North sea? I recognise that there is not the same demand or need on low-pressure pipelines. Can he confirm that those regulations will be retrospective?

I want to deal with the southern sector and the relevant content in the Bill. As the Minister said, the package is intended to be tax-neutral. The first stage of the package was presented in the Budget and confirmed in the Finance Act earlier this year. Although the intention is to be tax-neutral, the Minister made it clear that some encouragement would be given to new development in the North sea, especially the smaller gasfields that have been identified but, at present, are considered uneconomic to develop.

That whole process was undertaken in the northern oilfields in 1983, and was vigorously opposed by the Opposition at the time. There are substantial differences between the two areas. The southern basin comprises mainly gasfields, which are cheaper to develop and have lower operating costs. We opposed the 1983 measures for good reasons that I believe still apply today. The first is the principle on which royalties are paid. Oil and gas in the United Kingdom are publicly owned, and have been since 1934. That public ownership is confirmed and emphasised by the payment of royalties.

Secondly, the Government already have sufficient powers to restrict the payment of royalties in appropriate cases. The powers are contained in existing legislation and are much more sensitive and sophisticated than the proposed measure. They enable the Government to take a field-by-field approach, which is much more satisfactory than the system installed in the northern section in 1983 and now proposed for the southern basin. The blunderbuss approach will mean that some operators will benefit, but many will lose. The two biggest losers are likely to be Britoil, in respect of its Amethyst field, and Conoco.

There is another, more worrying aspect about the Government's general approach, and it was not mentioned by the Minister. British Gas is a monopoly purchaser in the southern basin—it is a monopoly. It can virtually dictate its terms and it negotiates field by field. At the time of the Budget debate, a number of analysts commented on that. The "FT North Sea Letter" of March 1988 stated:

> "On this front, both Capel and Woodmac raise the possibility of BG using the improved economics on some new projects to force the price it offers down further, thus taking the benefit itself. Woodmac calculates that a 1p/therm cut could now be made on Anglia without affecting its rate of return. Capel suggests BG could cut the Ravenspurn North price by 0·9p, Barque/Clipper by 0·5p and Welland by 0·1p to leave sellers with the same pre-Budget economics."

Even with those advantages over the northern sector, development costs are still very high in the southern sector. No operator will become involved in development costs until he has a contract signed, sealed and delivered by British Gas. The whole pace of development in the southern sector is therefore dictated by British Gas and its willingness to negotiate. Of course, British Gas is now a private company. No company can afford——

Mr. Hunter: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that it is Labour party policy not to remove royalties from the northern and southern sectors? In Committee on the Finance Bill, the Labour party argued for an even lower level of oil production. Are we to understand that Labour party policy is now to increase significantly the taxation burden on the oil industry?

Mr. Doran: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood what I said. Had he taken the trouble to read the report of the Finance Bill Committee, he would know the Labour party's position. At the time of the Finance Bill debates, the Labour party accepted some of the points made by the oil industry. In the original draft of the Bill, the Government had proposed a petroleum relief of 100,000 barrels, the oil industry argued for 160,000 and the Labour party tabled an amendment for 150,000. The Government compromised at 125,000 barrels, which we regarded as unsatisfactory. At that time, we also accepted that it was appropriate to remove the royalties as part of the package. However, we stand on the principle that the royalties are an expression and a confirmation of ownership of oil in the ground, and that is still the legal position. There is no question of supporting any increase in the level of taxation. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Gentleman.

The whole pace of development in the southern sector is dictated by British Gas, which is now, of course, a private company. Will the Minister tell the House what steps, if any, he proposes to take, first of all, to ensure that any fiscal benefits which accrued to the operator because of the measure now before us will be diverted to development and not simply negotiated into the pockets of British Gas? Secondly, is the Minister content to leave the pace of the development of the southern basin to a single monopoly private company, and, if so, in what way would the public interest be protected?

The second part of the Bill relates to an agreement between ourselves and the Irish Government. It must be put on the record—especially this week, when all the other debates about our relations with the Irish Government have been so difficult and fraught—that it is a pleasure to see that we can actually agree on something. Given the Prime Minister's statement yesterday, which today has been shown to be fairly ill-advised and misjudged, is the Minister satisfied that the agreement that was drawn up, presumably by those legal advisers to the Foreign Office, is safely signed, sealed and locked up in a safe of the Foreign Office and now inviolable?

5.50 pm

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): The Bill is not highly controversial, as the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) stated, and it should not place us in an adversarial position. However, it gives us the opportunity to discuss a vital and successful oil and gas industry. As we drive our cars, switch on our gas heaters or even purchase various manufactured items, which are derived from oil-based feedstock and from fossil reserves and resources which must be drawn from those reservoirs many thousands of feet below the surface of the earth, we often forget the hazardous human involvement until there is an occurrence, such as the recent Piper Alpha disaster.

If we study the fuel split in United Kingdom energy demand, we find that coal produces 13 per cent., electricity 14 per cent., gas 33 per cent. and oil 40 per cent. The domestic sector consumes only 30 per cent. of those resources, and the remainder is consumed by commerce, industry and transport. That is why it is vital to ensure that we get the pricing system right. If we look back at the late 1970s—during the period of the Labour Government—we find that the balance certainly was not right, because the domestic consumer of gas was being heavily subsidised by the industrial user. Recently British Gas has been called to account by Ofgas for leaning too heavily on the industrial consumer. I welcome the strong stand being taken by Ofgas and by James McKinnon, and I welcome, too, his determination to effect more control over this huge monopoly supplier.

It is in the context of our need to encourage further exploration and development of our oil and gas reserves that we should consider the Bill, which removes the royalties system for post-1982 oil and gas fields in the southern basin of the North sea. That abolition follows from the Finance Act 1983, when royalties in the northern and central North sea were abolished for future fields. At that time we were facing a downturn in activity in the offshore sector, so, in addition to the abolition of royalties in the northern and central sectors, the oil allowance from petroleum revenue tax was doubled to 500,000 tonnes. That produced a welcome increase in exploration and development. It was an act of faith on the part of the Government, and the results confirmed what those of us involved in energy matters had been pressing on the Treasury for some time before—that a tax regime cannot just be installed and then left indefinitely in the hope that, despite all the other factors, it will produce the desired result. In fact, we must have constant adjustments—which are especially necessary during a period of world instability in oil prices—if the free-enterprise companies are to be given incentives to make the huge investments which are inherent in exploration and development.

We must ask ourselves whether this year's reduction in the oil allowance—the question posed by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South—from 250,000 tonnes per chargeable period to 125,000 tonnes will truly balance out with the abolition of royalties and that we will have what the Treasury said would be a neutrally fiscal solution.

The original Budget proposal for an allowance of 100,000 tonnes for the southern basin would have had a deterrent effect. I believe that it was too low. The southern basin oil allowance would have been only one fifth of the level applied to new oil fields elsewhere and would have increased, rather than eliminated, the discrimination against the southern gas fields. I was, therefore, pleased when the Government upgraded the allowance to 125,000 tonnes, which I believe was the minimum figure.

Important oil companies, such as Conoco, have evaluated their positions. They are worried, and convinced, that they will lose about half of their post-1982 and future oil field valuations, because of the loss of the tax allowance. The problem in the oil industry is that every company has a different parameter within which to evaluate such matters, because of the nature of oil fields. However, we shall see the result. I stress how important it is for my right hon. Friend to monitor carefully the effects of any such changes on the level of activity and, if necessary—on behalf of this important industrial sector—to press the Treasury if and when the occasion arises.

We are fortunate to have these oil and gas reserves. As technology improves, the extent of the recoverable reserves will increase. We can now confidently expect to be self-sufficient in oil well into the 1990s—far beyond our expectations of a decade ago. In fact, since 1979 the estimates of initially recoverable reserves have risen by 13 per cent. The impact of that incredibly successful private enterprise industry on our economy is enormous—2·25 per cent. of our GDP in 1987, which is more than £4 billion in revenue from taxes and royalties, 85,000 jobs a year, and our United Kingdom offshore and onshore oil industry is winning a record 87 per cent. of the £2 billion orders for the North sea. Next year will signal the 25th year of this great endeavour in the North sea. We should congratulate all those who have made it possible.

At the same time, however, we must recognise the dangers inherent in a tough industrial environment; and, with the tragic Piper Alpha incident still fresh in our minds, it is right that Parliament should take every possible step to ensure that proper protection is given to those working in those hazardous conditions.

I would not want to prejudge the public inquiry, but I do not believe that the changes that the oil industry has been implementing in recent years have generally borne down on the safety standards on the rigs. It could not possibly be in the interests of a rig operator or an oil company to take short-cuts in safety. The huge losses of production that would result from an accident or a close-down would far outweigh the kind of cost reductions from such short-cuts. Safety and profitability inevitably go hand in hand, with safety always a step in front. That is the declared attitude in the oil industry, which I believe must generally be true. Nevertheless, the Piper Alpha disaster, on one of the oldest rigs in the North sea, requires the closest re-examination of training, safety procedures and equipment used on our rigs. The confidence of the work force and of the public must be fully restored by visible signs of the safest regime possible. I know that my right

[Mr. John Hannam]

hon. Friend accepts the Government's role in ensuring that the most rigorous statutory system of safety standards is effected.

Some 12 years ago my wife came back from having her hair done—that oftens happens—and told me that her hairdresser's husband was a scientific journalist who was considering the effects on metal oil rigs of prolonged immersion in sea water. Because I had an interest in energy, she asked me if I would meet him to have a chat. He produced a lot of evidence that he had collated. He was worried about some of the forecasts made to him privately by scientists suggesting that some oil rigs would collapse much earlier than expected. At that time, I tabled some questions to the then Secretary of State for Energy and wrote to and met various oil company chairmen, board members and scientists. At the end of my inquiries I was reasonably satisfied that those worries had been appreciated by all involved.

However, with the recent disasters on some oil rigs I thought back to that journalist's queries. I would like my right hon. Friend to reassure me that safety is still a priority and that we are unlikely to face the unexpected collapse of rigs because of the chemical effects of sea submersion upon the steel supports.

I saw a report in *The Scotsman* recently of comments made by Mr. Allan Millar, the general secretary of the Association of British Professional Divers, who said that he and other divers had expected the Piper Alpha platform to be one of the first to go. I do not think that he was forecasting the collapse and disaster that occurred, but he and other divers knew that the structure was becoming outdated and antiquated. He said that it was held together by clamps which had been installed after cracks appeared on nodes—the part of a rig's leg where various members are joined together. It is obvious that the fears expressed to me a long time ago about the long-term strength of rigs still remain. Therefore, we must consider carefully the strength and viability of the older rigs and ensure that we have a system to effect the necessary checks to prevent disasters.

We cannot eliminate the risks in North sea oil operations altogether. However, given the proper safety training, full use of new technology, a strict statutory regime, full equipment checks and a responsible approach by the operators, I am confident that the overall downward trend in accidents and injuries will continue. With the welcome agreement on compensation that has now been reached, the tragic Piper Alpha accident may result in a safer industry, which is vital to us all.

As we are discussing the oil industry, it is worth mentioning the major issue of the decommissioning or dismantling of our installations and pipelines. Since 1967, 150 fixed platforms and 3,000 miles of major sub-sea pipeline have been installed in the North sea, and obviously their abandonment will present a major financial and physical problem in years to come.

Crucial decisions on tax regulations, environmental protection and forms of dismantling are still to be made. One thing is clear, however: the cost will be enormous. The figure of £3 billion has been bandied about. That is higher than our nuclear decommissioning costs for the same period.

Some years ago in a similar debate in the House the idea was floated that some rigs could be towed offshore and turned into holiday hotels. I suspect that that idea is no longer even remotely tenable, but no doubt there will be other ingenious ideas for the re-use of the rigs. Perhaps *The House Magazine* might like to test Members' ingenuity with a competition for ideas. Their future use will be an important aspect of our deliberations. Because of the vast number of rigs and pipelines, and the hazards that they present, we must concentrate our minds on how best and to what extent we require the dismantling of rigs.

I welcome this small but important measure and hope that the House will give it a fair wind this evening.

6.4 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): It has aleady been said that next year will be the 25th year of North sea activity. I was not in at the beginning, but I have had contacts with the industry for 17 of its 24 years. I have seen it go through price hikes and collapses, peaks of profitability and economic squeezes. I recall the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) visiting my office shortly after he lost the October 1974 election. He was somewhat startled to be told that he had left his concern for and interest in the North sea a few months too late and that, had he paid greater attention to what was going on a little earlier, he might not have lost the election.

It is true that, at that time, the knowledge and detailed hold of the Government on the North sea was not as it should have been. That must be true, as they even resorted to using me as a source of information when answering parliamentary questions.

Mr. Robert Hughes: That was unwise.

Mr. Bruce: That might be so, but I knew more than the Government, although our sum knowledge might not have amounted to much.

In the 1970s, I always supported the case for a flexible taxation regime that took proper account of price changes, the real rates of return and the variations from field to field. When the North sea was being developed, when the real rush was on, the OPEC cartel became strong and it was rightly argued that the super-normal profits that that cartel would create for those producing oil and gas should accrue to the nation rather than the oil and gas companies. It was right that the regime then established ensured that the super-normal profits were effectively creamed off for the Exchequer. Now that oil prices are relatively depressed and there is a shortage of orders for the fabrication yards in some parts of the north of Scotland, the converse is true.

The pressure on the margins is acute, although companies have shown considerable ingenuity in cutting costs. It is appropriate, however, to ensure that tax regime changes take account of the significantly changing circumstances so that we do not have a severe front-end deterrent on oil companies, which would depress exploration and development activities. That would have been the case if the recent changes made by the Government, which I fully supported, had not been introduced. The Bill is the last element of those changes.

My view is not incompatible with that expressed by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran)—that there has been a period of over-production in the North sea. It is a matter of judgment—and only judgment—that oil sold today at $11 or $12 is, by definition, not available to be sold or used at a later date when the price in real terms might be higher or lower. Of course, the resource cannot be used twice.

I have always believed that oil and gas reserves are a strategic asset that belong to the nation and not to the oil companies. The extraction process should be geared to meet national and strategic requirements. To do that, we must ensure that there are optimum levels of development and exploration and that we know what is available. We need to ensure, as has been crudely suggested, that the plumbing is in first. If we are to impose a regulation on production, we must do it when the taps are installed. I support the Government's measures. We need to ensure that the maximum encouragement, exploration and development of associated and marginal fields takes place. I know that the Government do not agree, but if there is to be any restraint on production, it ought to be directed at larger fields, and only after all capital write-offs and uplifts have been secured by the operators so that they receive a full return on their investment.

We should be encouraging research and development into reducing the costs of oil development and recovery. Those of us closely connected with the industry are impressed by the way in which oil companies and related contracting engineers have found ways of reducing costs by using their imagination and a variety of different techniques and developing technologies.

In relating commercial factors to safety, one enters a sensitive area, but one must inevitably do so—the Minister was right to address it. Fourteen of my constituents were killed in the Piper Alpha disaster. The inquiry will take place in my constituency, which is also the location of Occidental's North sea operational headquarters—so the disaster had a definite and traumatic impact on people in my area. As the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South pointed out, looking through the casualty list, one finds just how wide is the distribution of the victims' addresses, showing that the industry is truly national and draws its work force from all over the United Kingdom. It should be fully understood that Piper Alpha was not just a local tragedy.

There are one or two areas of concern that should properly be explored in the public inquiry. However, the Minister knows that I have made it clear that he has responsibilities aside from the inquiry, and that I shall continue pressing him directly on those other matters. The hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) alluded to the particular problem of Piper Alpha and other older platforms. It worries me that it was possible to install process modules under a platform's accommodation section, and how that came to happen has not yet been satisfactorily explained. We still need to know how that came about.

Ministers know that I strongly support the case for an independent safety inspectorate. More power and resources will be needed to carry out inspections and to lay down standards. Those who work offshore, and their dependants, deserve to be satisfied and to have their concerns allayed. I feel sure that hon. Members representing Aberdeen constituencies and others will all have received many letters from those working offshore —many of them written anonymously. Normally, I discount anonymous letters but it is a matter of real concern that such people are unwilling to identify themselves. The Minister knows we must reassure them that action is being taken on offshore inspection and control.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South mentioned helicopter safety. It is a separate matter, in the sense that the Minister, when replying, can legitimately argue that it is not his departmental responsibility. However, as the Minister responsible for oil and gas, and as someone who uses helicopters when visiting platforms, he surely accepts that they are an essential component—the lifeline and main transport vehicles for North sea personnel. Statistically, the record of North sea helicopter operations is good, but that is not to deny that there have been one or two major catastrophes or that many more alarming incidents have often been averted only by the pilots' skill and experience. There was one such incident only a couple of weeks ago.

I accept that the CAA has made several changes over a number of years, but it takes too long to review accidents and to make recommendations, partly because the CAA lacks competence and authority in dealing with helicopter operations. I partly draw that as a parallel with the reason why we need a stronger and more independent offshore inspectorate. Not enough expertise and personnel are available to deal with inspections. Also, there are costs involved in safety, which inevitably creates tension.

The hon. Member for Exeter rightly said that no operator willingly cuts corners, because the cost of a catastrophe such as Piper Alpha far outweighs any possible saving. That is true, but judgment must still be exercised, particularly at a time when profit margins are tight. Appropriate safety measures are a matter of judgment, and where costs are involved, they are another factor to be considered, according to how seriously one weighs the safety benefit that will accrue. That is why, as the Minister will surely acknowledge, we need an offshore safety inspectorate able to make decisions free of commercial pressure.

In circumstances where one is dealing with a marginal field, and where costs are crucial, corners may not be cut but measures that, on balance, should be taken might not be because they might tip the field over the balance of viability. That is an extreme example, but it illustrates my point that commercial factors cannot be wholly ignored.

Given that the Government have been flexible and responsive in meeting the industry's commercial needs, it is reasonable to maintain independent pressure on the industry to ensure the highest safety standards.

Mr. Hunter: On the hon. Gentleman's remark that companies might cut corners, is that speculation or does he know, from his far greater knowledge of North sea exploration than I have, that companies are doing so?

Mr. Bruce: That is a fair question. Other hon. Members may share my experience that people working offshore believe it to be the case and could quote chapter and verse. The problem is that they are not willing to testify against the companies for which they work, and those who have left risk being accused of having an axe to grind. The answer is that specific cases are quoted, but I am not in a position to judge their validity. However, I am entitled to say that concern exists and that we should take account of it.

It is that which convinces me that the inspectorate should be independent of the Department of Energy. Both

[Mr. Bruce]

the Secretary of State and the Minister of State have on occasion rebutted robustly, and with some chagrin, the implication that their inspectors are in some way compromised. I am sure that they are sincere, but Ministers must understand that they also are part of the commercial calculation, or are perceived to be so. That is because, first, the Government's revenue is affected by costs, profitability, and the ultimate level of taxation; secondly, their balance of trade figures are affected by production levels. I do not quarrel with the Minister's sincerity in commenting on his own Department, but it is a matter not just of justice being seen to be done and of independence being assured, but of the inspectorate being operated in such a way that it cannot be questioned and is recognised as something apart—in which those having any commercial interest are not directly involved.

The nuclear industry, where levels of concern about safety are much higher, has a shortfall of nuclear inspectors. If, despite pressure being applied, the nuclear industry has been left with a shortfall, is it not arguable that the oil industry has been left with one greater than it needs to be?

The hon. Members for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Exeter also mentioned the toppling of Piper Alpha. The concern surrounding that disaster arises not least because not all the victims' bodies have been recovered. Here we enter the realm of personal distress, particularly since most bodies have been recovered. For many people, it is a psychological necessity that the body be returned and that there be a proper funeral so that, although tragedy has struck, at least it may be given a proper and final ending. For those who have not been given that opportunity, there is continuing, open-ended distress. The House will recognise that for those individuals the suggestion that the platform's remnants may be destroyed without the remaining bodies being recovered is unacceptable. The Minister said that he would comment on that, and I look forward to hearing what he has to say.

I served on the Standing Committee considering the preliminary enabling Bill that dealt with the abandoning of offshore platforms. We had many ingenious and rather light-hearted discussions about the possible options, but a general feeling emerged that the toppling of such installations—although relatively cheap—was not an acceptable final solution. First, we need an assurance that any action on Piper Alpha will not establish a precedent for any other field disposal.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I am sorry to interrupt—I have been trying not to do so—but I can give a categorical assurance that that is so.

Mr. Bruce: That is a helpful and welcome assurance.

There is some concern that the offshore industry may be dealt with differently from other industries in which it is in close competition. It is widely reported that the Electricity Bill, which was presented to the House today and will be published tomorrow, will contain a pretty open-ended taxpayers' indemnity of the nuclear industry for the decommissioning of nuclear power stations, the cost of which is estimated at £3 billion. That is comparable with the estimate of the cost of disposal of North sea platforms.

It would be unfair if oil and gas companies and their customers were forced to absorb their costs with no assistance, while the privatised nuclear power operators' costs were contributed in full by the taxpayer. It would also be unfair to fishermen and other seafarers if the cheaper option of toppling platforms were pursued on the ground that the oil and gas industries were not being treated as generously as other industries and could not afford to absorb their costs. Debate on that will continue, but I wish to put down a marker now: many of us are not at all happy about the balance.

Like others who have spoken, I am happy to support the Bill's relatively limited objectives. It is, as the Minister has said, part of a package, not all of which I agree with but which should ensure the continuation of a viable offshore oil and gas industry. I should, however, like to pick up two of the Minister's comments about onshore exploration.

I agree that the industry has a good record on environmental restoration, and has been able to harmonise its activities effectively. Nevertheless, at a time of North sea over-production, it is surely inappropriate to press for developments in areas of dense population where there is pressure on amenities. Local authorities, particularly in the south of England, are understandably sensitive to that.

We have yet to observe the final results, but we hope that the change will be fiscally neutral, which would help the continuing development of gasfields in the North sea. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) commented on the monopoly position of British Gas. I wonder whether the measure will have any effect on that company's wish to import gas from elsewhere. Does the Minister think that it will enable sufficient gas to be provided to meet our requirements for the foreseeable future? Personally, I doubt it.

This is a modest but sensible step, which tidies up matters. I think that we all agree that the future of the North sea industry is much greater than its past, and that, in spite of its difficulties, the industry will employ many people, using ingenuity and technology, for a long time to come. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are anxious to ensure that the industry continues to thrive.

6.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): As the past few years have shown, the theme of North sea oil and gas production and exploration has not set the scene for major confrontation between the two sides of the House; and I do not intend to inject a note of confrontation tonight. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) for clarifying his party's concept of the ideal fiscal framework in which the industry should operate. I now understand that the party welcomes the withdrawal of royalties, but seeks a tax allowance of 150,000 tonnes per chargeable period.

I readily confess that I have come to the debate unprepared, because I thought that we had already had it. Those of us who sat through the 100 or so hours of the Committee stage of the Finance Bill were under the impression that all this was behind us, and I find myself enveloped by a sense of political déjà vu. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), who has just left the Chamber for an important engagement, would share both my hope that the debate will be short and my belief that it has already been well covered in Committee.

I think that the industry will say of the Bill, "About time too." As long ago as 1983, when royalties were removed from the northern and central fields, the industry said that the same should apply to the southern fields. The withdrawal of royalties from the northern and central fields was accompanied, under the Finance Act 1983, by a doubling of the oil allowance from 250,000 tonnes per chargeable period to 500,000. This Bill reduces the allowance. The Government accepted in 1983 that oil revenue could and should be reduced to further and promote exploration and investment. In my view, the financial and economic climate of 1983 was rather different from that of 1988, although Opposition Members may argue differently: the economy was less robust than it is now. But the Government were prepared to decrease North sea oil revenue, whereas in these healthier days they are making other demands.

That fount of all wisdom, Conservative central office, has reminded Conservative Members of the political perception for which my right hon. Friend the Minister is so renowned, and has drawn our attention to his departmental press release of 15 March, which stated:

> "It had become clear to the Government, in the light of our discussions with the industry, that the Southern Basin fiscal regime was becoming insensitive to the economic realities of more recent fields and could be an obstacle to the development of worthwhile projects. The incidence of royalty, a non-profit-related levy, was the most serious impediment."

I entirely accept that basic proposition.

We should bear in mind the principle, or maxim, that what is good for the United Kingdom offshore industry is good for the United Kingdom, and what is best for that industry is best for the United Kingdom. The objective of our policies must be to prolong the self-sufficiency of the North sea into the late 1990s—and, we hope, beyond—and to increase the estimates of resources that are economically recoverable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) drew attention to some of the basic statistics of the North sea industry: that oil contributes 2·25 per cent. to our gross domestic product and provides the Government with revenue in excess of £4 billion—very approximately the equivalent of 4p on the standard rate of income tax. The number of people who are directly employed in the industry was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter, as well as, if I remember correctly, by the hon. Member for Gordon—about 85,000. The oil industry has enormous repercussions on employment throughout the country and provides tremendous spin-offs. A recent manpower studies paper suggested that well over 500,000 jobs depend on the North sea oil and gas industry.

Last year, 132 offshore explorations and appraisals were started, besides 38 onshore appraisals. About eight wells are producing oil on shore. The second largest of those wells is partly in my constituency. Humbley Grove oil production straddles the parliamentary constituencies of Basingstoke, Winchester and Hampshire, East. We must not under-estimate the importance of the industry. We need to create the fiscal climate within which it will flourish.

There is one matter about which I begin to quarrel with the Government. The purpose behind the package, part of which was introduced in the Finance Act and part of which we have here, is to establish fiscal neutrality. My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury is on record as saying:

> "we wanted to set the petroleum revenue tax oil allowance at a level that would leave the overall tax take unchanged over the life of the fields affected".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 16 June 1988; c. 512.]

Questions need to be asked about fiscal neutrality. First, has it been achieved? Secondly, is it necessary to achieve it? Thirdly—this is my own proposition—would it not be far better not to achieve it? As to whether fiscal neutrality is maintained by the Finance Act and this Bill, the industry is adamant that it is not. It persists in saying that the oil allowance should be 160,000 tonnes per chargeable unit. If that is not the allowance, operations that are marginally viable will no longer be viable. The industry says that the Treasury and the Department of Energy have got it wrong—that it should be 160,000 tonnes, not 125,000 tonnes.

As to whether fiscal neutrality has been achieved, there may well be a strong argument that it has not been. The next question is whether it is necessary to achieve fiscal neutrality. I am a staunch supporter of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I applaud all that he has achieved. We are told that last year there was a surplus of revenue over expenditure of £3·6 billion and that this year there is likely to be a surplus of revenue over expenditure of between £10 billion and £12 billion. If there is such a surplus of revenue over expenditure, and if North sea oil and gas are so important to us—as they are—we do not need to maintain fiscal neutrality. We can look for a genuine lowering of the tax burden on that vital part of our national economy.

My right hon. Friend the Member for the City of Chester (Mr. Morrison) and other hon. Members have acknowledged that the debate has provided an opportunity for wide discussion of North sea matters. I do not propose to repeat what has already been well expressed. Of course the priority is safety. We are totally united about that, and I echo the sentiments that have already been expressed. No hon. Member could take part in the debate without recalling the Piper Alpha incident and wishing to be identified with the sympathy that has been offered to those who suffered injury and to those families who suffered bereavement. I identify myself with those expressions of sympathy.

I hope that there will be a clear and unequivocal assurance that everything possible will be done in what remains a hazardous enterprise to ensure the maximum level of safety. The hon. Member for Gordon referred to the fact that North sea exploration began 25 years ago. We must acknowledge that achievement. It was pioneering work of the first order. Technological advances of that kind deserve the highest praise. They have been of the utmost benefit to our economy. A debate of this nature is an appropriate occasion to recall those achievements.

The hon. Member for Gordon and I were involved in the 1987 Standing Committee proceedings on the Petroleum Bill. On that occasion, we had to consider the abandonment of oilfields, which is becoming an even greater reality; the days of abandonment are drawing nearer. There was some objective, non-political controversy in the Standing Committee proceedings. I should like my right hon. Friend the Minister to take this opportunity to assure us again that he is convinced that the Government have sufficient powers to control the abandonment of platforms and pipelines.

The abolition of royalties is to be welcomed. It will enable marginal fields to remain economically viable. It is

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

absolutely right that tax should be paid on profits rather than on production. I confess to having profound doubts about whether fiscal neutrality has been achieved. Heretic though it may make me, I happen to believe that we need not even seek fiscal neutrality.

6.37 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I have privately as well as publicly congratulated my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) on his elevation to the Opposition Front Bench, but I want to take this first opportunity in the House to repeat my warm congratulations to him, especially on his debut, and to wish him much success in the future as an Opposition spokesperson and, I hope, as the years go by, as a Minister.

I have been involved, mainly as a Front-Bench representative, with two of the three major disasters of recent times: first, the Herald of Free Enterprise at Zeebrugge; secondly, the King's Cross fire disaster; and, thirdly, when I was involved as a constituency MP, the Piper Alpha disaster. In a strange kind of way—I take no comfort from this—we marvel that in all three major accidents more lives were not lost. The Herald of Free Enterprise keeled over 100 yd from shore. Everybody on board that ship could have been lost. Many more people could have been lost in the King's Cross disaster. Those who saw the dramatic photographs in the technical report that was published by the Department or who saw, admittedly from afar, the battered remains of the Piper Alpha platform cannot understand how anybody survived. It is a miracle that more people did not die, but we cannot take any comfort from that.

With all three incidents, there is a strong feeling that commerce and competition came before safety. With the Herald of Free Enterprise, there is no doubt that the drive of competition and to maximise profit led to quicker turn-rounds and sloppiness with regard to safety.

As for King's Cross, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind—I think that the Fennell report bears it out—that those who were in charge of London Underground were far more concerned with cash and cutting public subsidy than with safety. Again, sloppiness crept in. The day after the fire, I saw underneath the escalator. I was told that, on that one wooden escalator, there had already been 12 fires which had gone out without causing major loss of life. I incline towards the view that there is a correlation in the North sea between price stability and attention to safety. Everybody denies that. In discussions with the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association—other hon. Members have had similar discussions—and when we visited the Tartan Alpha platform, everybody assured us that safety was always paramount. If it were not true in the past, Piper Alpha has concentrated everybody's mind. I have no doubt that the issue has been considered afresh.

All of us who have been involved have been flooded with letters and inundated by people coming to see us to tell us about breaches of safety legislation and practice. They tell us that they felt that they were being driven to get on with their job because nobody wanted the platform to shut down. It is difficult to know how to judge hearsay evidence. I normally tell people who come to see me and those who give me their names and addresses to make their evidence public. I tell them to make it available to the Lord Cullen inquiry. Everybody owes it to the living and to the dead to ensure that no aspect of safety is overlooked.

I understand that Lord Cullen cannot look into every allegation and every possible aspect of safety in the North sea, nor would we want him to do so. We want a thorough examination, but we want fairly speedy conclusions. Perhaps the Minister can tell us what will happen at the end of the inquiry. What immunities have been given to the participants in the inquiry? To get the evidence at the Zeebrugge inquiry, a blanket immunity from prosecution was given to anybody who took part. Some qualified immunities have been given in regard to the Piper Alpha inquiry. I am not seeking vengeance any more than anyone else, but if clear knowledge of breaches of safety legislation emerges, the people concerned ought to be prosecuted further. I hope that, whatever qualified immunities might have been given, there is no blanket immunity from prosecution.

None of us wants to prejudge the outcome of the Cullen inquiry. I have already said publicly, and repeated it in the House, that I believe that Lord Cullen has begun his inquiry in a way which leads me to have confidence that we shall get a fair and reasonable result.

There is controversy about the independence of the safety inspectors. I have some doubt whether an independent safety commission would be as beneficial as is sometimes suggested. There is an incestuous relationship between the industry and the Department. It is neither here nor there whether that relationship is real or apparent; there is a close relationship, and people feel that it has got a bit too cosy and that perhaps the commission should be one step removed.

I know that some hon. Members feel very strongly about this issue, but my hesitation on the subject arises out of the fact that the commission cannot be entirely independent of the Government. Moreover, I do not believe that the Government's safety record is very good. I would not dare to cast aspersions on the Secretary of State or the Minister of State. I have already said that they have conducted themselves well since the Piper Alpha inquiry started, but some Ministers have departed and some may yet come in whose judgment I would not necessarily trust. We must approach the subject of independence carefully and seek an assurance, yet again, that the safety inspectors have the greatest possible independence.

I do not know why the oil industry is so hesitant. When the Opposition have demanded more trade union involvement in safety and organisation on the rigs, some people have thought that we are pursuing our natural political and industrial inclination to favour the trade unions. I am a Member sponsored by the Amalgamated Engineering Union. That union recruits members from among those working in the North sea, so people would expect me to say that we want strong trade union organisation, but it is not simply a matter of having trade union organisation because we have a vested interest in it.

I believe fervently that active trade unionists in any industry are concerned for members and colleagues, irrespective of whether their workmates are members of a trade union. I cannot understand why the oil industry has resisted proper trade union membership. The vast majority of the majors who operate in the North sea have onshore, downstream activities where for many years they have happily accommodated union safety representatives and even closed shops. Why can they not allow the same in the North sea? They say that they are perfectly happy to allow organisation. It cannot be contradicted, however, that when a trade union organiser applies to go to a platform his application is welcomed but it just happens that a place on a helicopter cannot be found for another six months.

It might be asked why organisers do not organise the lads when they come on shore. Having been offshore for a fortnight, men want to get home to their wives and families; they do not want to hang about at trade union meetings. It is entirely understandable that they want to get the first aeroplane south—because this is not a wholly Aberdeen-based industry.

When there has been some organisation, because half a dozen good trade unionists have got together, it is well documented that when they come up for their next tour of duty they are put on different ships or different platforms. The cohesion which has begun to be built up is therefore broken. Why is the oil industry not prepared to allow proper trade union organisation? I believe that such organisation is important.

I do not know how many other hon. Members wish to speak, but I apologise to the Minister as I may not be able to be present to hear his reply. It is not entirely satisfactory that he should deal with the debris of the platform in his winding-up speech because we do not know what he will say. That is a minor carp. I know that the Minister of State is hoping that I shall hurry up and finish.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I am keen to help the hon. Gentleman. However, I wanted first to be 100 per cent. sure that I should in no sense mislead the House. I have now discovered that I should not be misleading the House, so I shall tell the hon. Gentleman precisely what the position is.

It was only last night that a proposition was put in my box relating to the abandonment of Piper Alpha, which I approved. It is obviously a matter of great importance. The proposition then went to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy. This morning, my right hon. Friend also approved that proposition. For the sake of accuracy, it may be helpful for me to spell out precisely what the proposition is.

Under section 4 of the Petroleum Act 1987, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has approved the abandonment programme for Piper Alpha, submitted by Occidental and its co-venturers. This proposes the use of explosive charges to topple the remains of the installation and to put them on to the sea bed, away from the existing pile of debris, leaving at least 75m of clear water above all remains.

The approval is not final. The proposed conditions to be attached to my right hon. Friend's approval include requirements for surveys of the toppled remains and surrounding sea bed to establish the position of debris and to monitor for leakage of oil and gas. They also require sediment samples to be obtained and examined for the presence of polychlorinated biphenyls and radioactivity. The conditions provide for repetition of these surveys and of sediment sampling at such times as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may subsequently direct. They also provide for debris to be moved, or removed, as my right hon. Friend may direct; for any leakage of oil or gas to be sealed to his satisfaction; and for steps to be taken to deal with any unacceptable levels of pollution.

All those proposals are subject to approval, and the operating company will have the opportunity to raise objections under the statute. The proposals have not yet been conveyed to anyone other than hon. Members in the House today, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, myself and one or two officials. I hope that that has been helpful.

Mr. Hughes: The Minister has been very helpful. If I made any charge of discourtesy in my speech, I acquit him of it.

There were two points with which the Minister did not deal. The first point concerns the bodies. I come from a seafaring family of generations back and I know from experience—although none of my family has been lost at sea—how seafaring families find it difficult to come to terms with death if no body is found. After the Zeebrugge and the Piper Alpha disasters, the relatives of those who died found it difficult to come to terms with the deaths. If the Piper Alpha platform is toppled, perhaps there will be a further search for bodies around the platform.

The other matter about which I am anxious is that the evidence that may be available about corrosion will be difficult to obtain. I said earlier that I did not expect Lord Cullen to go into every aspect of safety in the North sea, but I believe that corrosion is extremely important in relation to safety. The hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) mentioned corrosion and safety. As the Minister has made a final decision about the platform, I hope that he will assure us that there will be ample opportunity to study corrosion.

I believe that the oil industry is under an obligation to carry out a proper restitution of the immediate area of its operations in the North sea after abandonment. It should not have been allowed to say that it was starting a great programme, providing wealth for the nation and many jobs and that it would look after the area and then later say that it is too poor to make proper restitution.

I do not share the view that is held by some of my hon. Friends that these measures should be fiscally neutral. The oil industry generally has done pretty well out of the North sea and it should have provided more for the Government. The only comfort I take is that, although the oil industry did not produce as much for the Government as I should have liked, the Government have totally squandered the North sea revenues that they received. When North sea oil drilling began, the Opposition argued strongly that there should be a specific investment fund and that revenue should go to develop not only Aberdeen—although, of course, it needed development—but the infrastructure for the manufacturing capacity of this country. That was resisted because the Treasury dislikes hypothetical revenues, and that allowed the Government to waste the assets of the North sea. I hope that they will do better with those assets in future. I look forward to seeing the benefits from the North sea accruing to the people of this country —not only to the oil companies and those who have shares in the business.

6.57 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): I shall try to be as brief as possible.

The Bill has been warmly welcomed by Labour and Conservative Members and by the oil industry. The new fiscal regime will help to remove obstacles to the development of worthwhile and economically viable

[Mr. Malcolm Moss]

projects. The Government have recognised that royalty—a non-profit-related levy—was the most serious impediment to development. The abolition of royalty, coupled with tax changes, will give a new incentive for new gas developments and developments onshore. By removing the tax on wells and substituting a tax on profits, we now have a fairer system, which will encourage marginal projects to come forward and which should give a boost to the smaller and more independent oil companies. Despite a good record of new fields being developed and new wells being drilled, we should seek to exact the maximum return from this most valuable national asset.

I shall now deal with the question of undrilled acreage. The problem of the banking of acreage stems from the first four rounds of licensing. There is still a major incentive to the oil companies to develop that acreage. The licences end in the period 2010-18 and the Bill does not provide for the extension of those licences. The normal lifespan is 20 years, so the licensees may run out of time to complete extraction during the period of tenure of the licence. They are urged to come forward so that they do not fall foul of the time limit.

The Government believe that there are now good grounds for seeking to secure new impetus in the exploration of undrilled acreage. One obvious point is that the undrilled portion is an important potential addition to the United Kingdom's oil and gas reserves. Recent developments in recovery technology have improved the viability of smaller fields. The Department of Energy is encouraging licensees of undrilled plots to explore them more thoroughly. The Department has made it clear that the oil companies are expected to give details of plans to do just that.

I am delighted that the Minister made the clear point in a recent announcement that the new applications for the 11th round will be considered in the light of the existing licensees' plans on undrilled acreage. That is most welcome, and I urge my right hon. Friend to press that point whenever possible. Any measure that helps to avoid the banking of acreage is to be welcomed.

I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware of the report from stockbrokers Gilbert Eliott who looked at the problem and made certain suggestions. Instead of the full United Kingdom continental shelf coming forward in a series of licensing rounds, the report proposed that the shelf should be divided into four regions and that all the available acreage should be offered once a year, by quarters in rotation. If any block remained undrilled for 10 years, the Department could demand its relinquishment.

The report claims that the scheme will have several advantages. First, there will be a constant work load for the industry and the Department of Energy, which is surely to be welcomed; secondly, sitting on undrilled acreage will cease; thirdly, regional geological assessments would become possible; fourthly, long-term exploration planning would be easier; fifthly—most important—there would be constant opportunity for new entrants.

Many new entrants are our own United Kingdom independent producers. They are an important group and their vital contributions have recently been acknowledged by the Minister. However, this year the number of United Kingdom independents has fallen by about a quarter. In February we had 40 companies; in August we had only 31. Such companies are facing several problems at present, such as the fact that their cash flows are not good and the oil price is depressed. The OPEC decision of the last few days may be of some encouragement to them.

Many United Kingdom independents are involved in onshore exploration. It is to be welcomed that the Bill gives a great step forward by having a royalties exemption clause for onshore exploration. However, problems still face those who wish to develop on shore: for example, the reserve sizes are questionable, the planning process is lengthy and there is no petroleum tax relief. I recently heard further evidence to the effect that the cost of drilling a well on shore to a depth of 6,000 ft. would cost about £750,000, whereas an offshore 15,000-ft. well would cost £2·7 million. However, when tax is taken into consideration, the net cost of the onshore well would be £480,000 compared with only £430,000 for the offshore well.

Managements involved in decision-making face competing demands on their costs. Often, the choice is made in favour of an offshore field, probably abroad, instead of encouraging the development of our United Kingdom potential to its full.

Finally, I turn to the southern basin—an area of the North sea that is important to my constituency and significant to the economy of East Anglia. The development of additional gas reserves will help preserve the production and infrastructure that is in place, and will keep jobs in my region. With electricity privatisation, there are serious possibilities of gas coming on shore for gas turbine stations. That would be a welcome addition to electricity generation in the area.

One cannot stress enough the importance of the fiscal changes in the Bill and their importance to investment decisions in the oil industry. However, there appears to be some difference in interpretation between the Government and the oil companies on the importance of internal rates of return on a field at the expense of concerns about the present value and pattern of cash flow.

I believe that when these matters were dealt with in Committee on the Finance Bill, the oil industry raised the question of the level of tonnes per chargeable period, which the Bill brings down from 250,000 to 125,000. Will the Minister give an assurance that he will monitor that regularly to ensure that it does not militate against development and that the necessary new fields come forward as we hope?

We have heard from the Minister this evening that we have a buoyant oil and gas industry. All who work in the industry deserve our greatest admiration and gratitude. Theirs is a dangerous occupation and since the Piper Alpha disaster, which has been referred to by many hon. Members, many families must be under considerable mental and emotional pressure as they await the return of their loved ones from tours of duty on the rigs. This House and those families are grateful for the Minister's categorical assurance that the highest safety standards are operated at present, and will be in the future.

7.4 pm

Mr. Doran: This has been an extremely useful debate, although at some distance removed from the precise purpose of the Bill. However, it has highlighted some of the major problems and issues that are faced in the offshore oil and gas industries.

The points made by the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), who is not in his place at the moment, seemed to be a plea on behalf of the oil industry, not just for the fiscal neutrality of the Bill, but for a lowering of tax rates. I certainly do not agree with that, and I am sure that none of my hon. Friends would agree either, unless the lowering of tax rates were related specifically to development proposals.

I take on board the points made by the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) about the banking of acreage and our need to encourage development. Some of his points bear further scrutiny.

The major issue that we must deal with is that of safety. Several points have been put to the Minister, who has already responded favourably to one of them. I was pleased to hear his statement on the importance of the abandonment of the Piper Alpha platform. However, I should like him to be specific on one point. When I recently met the Secretary of State for Energy—if my memory serves me correctly I should also have met the Minister of State, but he was called away to Downing street for something which, unfortunately, appears not to have been noteworthy or important—the right hon. Gentleman was at pains to point out that what was intended at this stage was an interim measure in the interests of safety because there was serious concern that the remains of the Piper Alpha platform could topple in the bad winter weather. Despite the fact that supports are being manufactured for the remains of the platform, it is not likely that the platform will survive the winter. Therefore, I am a wee bit unsure about what the Minister said earlier in response to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes). I am not sure whether the Minister is now talking about an interim measure, or a more permanent arrangement. I should like him to clarify that if he can.

The question of safety in the North sea has been canvassed because it is the main issue at the moment and concerns us all. I have already said that the Government should not sit on their hands and wait until the report from Lord Cullen's inquiry is available before dealing with the obvious points that require action now. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to that.

I hope that the Minister will take on board the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North about trade union rights. Again, at recent meetings with the Secretary of State it was made clear that the publication of the consultation document leading to regulations for safety committees and safety representatives in the North sea was likely. We shall continue to press our points on trade union representation. It is not just a question of establishing safety committees, because such committees require back-up. Onshore there is a well-established, well-tried system, involving trade unions on a statutory basis. Those committees have been shown to be enormously successful in improving the onshore safety record.

We want the same thing to happen offshore. We want the members of those safety committees and the safety representatives to have access to the independent information and advice that is provided by the trade unions' research staff. We want a genuine contribution to safety in the North sea through the establishment of such committees and safety representatives, not a muted or toothless talking shop.

The matter of the inquiry is coupled with the points made about the Piper Alpha platform. Will the Minister repeat the assurance given to me in a private discussion that every effort will be made to recover whatever evidence remains at the bottom of the sea? I understand the difficulty and the risk involved in recovering the various modules that still lie on the sea bed under this dangerous platform. I hope the Minister understands that there is still much uncertainty, for example, about where the original explosion occurred and how it occurred. Can he give us an assurance that no effort will be spared to recover vital evidence?

7.10 pm

Mr. Peter Morrison: I agree with the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) that this has been a constructive debate. It has also given the House the opportunity to range more widely than the precise provisions in the Bill, and that is helpful, not least because for the last 18 months we have not had an opportunity to debate the oil and gas industries. Very important issues have been raised, some of which dealt with the tragedy in July on Piper Alpha. The debate has not been very political, and perhaps the industry is successful because politics and politicians do not interfere in it to any great extent.

I shall attempt quickly to answer the questions raised in the debate. The hon. Members for Aberdeen, South, for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) asked whether the work of the safety directorate would continue during Lord Cullen's public inquiry. I can give a categorical assurance that that is correct. I thought that I said earlier that that will be the case. I was also asked about the emergency shut-down valves. Proposals about those have been received by my Department from the industry, and in the light of those we are urgently considering what new regulations would be appropriate.

The point has been made to me in my office and elsewhere that there should be a separate safety directorate. The hon. Member for Gordon said that I rebutted that with chagrin and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy was prone to doing the same. I do not think that I did it like that; but, of course, I accept that that is how my reaction may have been judged. I thought that I said, in as reasonable a way as possible, that Lord Cullen would look at that matter and that we would look carefully at the recommendations in Lord Cullen's report. If my reaction came across as chagrin, it was not meant as such.

As the Opposition know, we have followed the majority decision of the Burgoyne committee which was made at the beginning of this decade. That was assumed to be a satisfactory way of proceeding, and until that fateful evening in July not one parliamentary question had been put to me about the safety regime as such. Obviously hon. Members and outside bodies feel strongly about this matter, and it will be looked at carefully in the public inquiry.

[Mr. Peter Morrison]

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South asked specifically about the abandonment of the Piper Alpha platform. In an intervention during his speech I gave him an answer to that question. I repeat that the decision made overnight by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I was subject to certain conditions.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South asked whether debris would be moved or removed. One of the conditions of the abandonment proposals is that my right hon. Friend can provide for debris to be moved, or removed, as he may direct. It was not until I intervened in the hon. Gentleman's speech that I made public at all, even to Occidental, the situation as it stands.

Mr. Doran: The other main point I made about platform abandonment was whether the decision announced today by the Minister was a permanent or interim decision.

Mr. Morrison: It is subject to the possibility of written representations by Occidental. In my office the hon. Gentleman and I discussed toppling the platform outwards. Such a controlled toppling would ensure that the remaining debris would be not be crumpled, or crumpled further, as it might be if the platform were toppled by natural forces. I hope that I have made the position clear, as I understand it.

I was asked about pipelines and whether the certifying authorities were properly co-ordinated. I can give an assurance that that is the case. If the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South has any specific matter to raise with me, perhaps he could do so after the debate and I shall quite happily look at it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) spoke about discussions that he and his wife had had with friends about the corrosion of platforms. I assure him that there is a continuing requirement for platforms to be regularly examined for corrosion. They will continue to be structurally examined at regular intervals by the certifying authorities so that they come up to the standards required by regulations before certificates of fitness can be issued. I hope that my hon. Friend is reassured by that.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South asked about the British Gas monopoly. Perhaps that matter concerns many hon. Members. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission produced a report a little earlier this year. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has asked the Director General of Fair Trading to look at the proposal in the MMC report that up to 90 per cent. of a particular field should be sold to British Gas and that the other 10 per cent. should be sold to another client. As the hon. Gentleman realises, more customers are coming forward. One can quote, for example, the sale of gas from the Miller field to the North of Scotland Hydro Electricity Board. To a certain extent, that is starting to break what might have been a monopoly.

I do not wish to detain the House any further because we have other important matters to discuss. The Bill is short and remarkable for being uncontroversial. It is the first Bill to be presented in this Session and it is important because it has a key part to play in the economy and in industry. I am most heartened that there is cross-party agreement on the Bill, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

Committee tomorrow.

Procedure

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

[Relevant Procedure Committee documents: Second Report (HC 49 of Session 1984-85) on Public Bill Procedure; Second Report (HC 324 of Session 1985-86) on Allocation of Time to Government Bills in Standing Committee; First Report (HC 157 of Session 1986-87) on A Parliamentary Calendar; Second Report (HC 350 of Session 1986-87) on Use of Time on the Floor of the House; Third Report (HC 254 of Session 1986-87) on Early Day Motions; Fourth Report (HC 373 of Session 1986-87) on the Work of the Committee; and First Report (HC 705 of Session 1987-88) on the Implications for Procedure of the Experiment in Televising the Proceedings of the House.]

7.18 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): One of the many duties of the Leader of the House is to try to ensure that its procedures are kept under regular review and that the House has opportunities from time to time to express its opinions on procedural matters. Tonight's debate on a motion for the Adjournment provides such an opportunity and will enable hon. Members to raise any aspect of procedure in which they have an interest.

The main matters before us tonight are the Procedure Committee's reports, listed on the Order Paper. I shall make some comments on those reports later in my speech, but first I should like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and the fellow members of his Committee for their conscientious and valuable work. I understand that my hon. Friend hopes to catch your eye later tonight, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to hearing what he has to say.

In addition to these reports, however, there are several other current procedural matters which are of particular concern to a number of hon. Members. The Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure has recently produced a report of fundamental importance, for which I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson) and to the other members of his Committee. As hon. Members will appreciate, the report will require detailed and extensive consultation. This is bound to take some time, and I see no prospect of legislation being introduced this Session, but I have said that, unusually, I will try to arrange a debate before the Government have responded to the Committee's recommendation in the normal way so that the views of the House can be expressed.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am sure that the Leader of the House will realise that this is not only an excellent report but the culmination of a great deal of concern in the House about this matter. He is saying that there will be a chance for an early debate, but little chance of changing Standing Orders in this Session. Does that mean that private Bills being introduced in 12 months' time will still go on under the old procedure? Many hon. Members feel that that would be unsatisfactory.

I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman is aware that there are moves afoot from various hon. Members to block private business so as to precipitate a decision. I for one would not be too enthusiastic at having to carry out that exercise for a whole 12 months. Will the Leader of the House at least give thought to the idea that, by the time Bills are introduced in 12 months, we should have the new procedures in operation?

Mr. Wakeham: I am not sure that I go along with the hon. Member's suggestion that it is acceptable to deal with matters before the House not on the merits of the issues but having regard to other considerations which are nothing to do with the promoters of the Bill or the merits of the Bill. I know that he wants to be helpful, and I wish to be helpful as well. This is an important report, and we should not delay it unnecessarily. The right thing to do is to have a debate as soon as we can to hear the views. I said, not that Standing Orders could not be altered if that was the will of the House, but that the legislation that will be necessary to implement some of these proposals could not be introduced this Session. The best thing is to proceed with a debate on the issue as soon as we can, to hear the views and see whether there is a measure of agreement as to how we should proceed and in what direction.

Another issue which came significantly and sadly to the fore in the last Session of Parliament was the behaviour of hon. Members in the Chamber. We all expect that debates will sometimes be passionate and that feelings will run high, but we also expect Members to bow to your authority, Mr. Speaker, when you rule that things have gone far enough. Last Session, hon. Members were suspended from the service of the House nine times, compared with just 17 previous such occasions in more than 40 years since the war. This fact perhaps shows that the penalty of a five-day suspension is no longer enough when calculated against the media publicity that such suspensions entail. Hon. Members may wish to air their views on this matter this evening. I am sure that the Procedure Committee, which is currently considering the matter, will find them helpful.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is there not another side to this coin, which is that the most senior Ministers of the House of Commons should tell the truth to the House of Commons?

Mr. Wakeham: I refute that. I do not believe that it is any justification for disobeying Mr. Speaker, on any basis. I am surprised that the hon. Member, with his experience, believes that that justifies him disobeying Mr. Speaker.

A further matter affecting the procedures of the House which will be in hon. Members' minds is the effect which television has on our deliberations. The Committee has just published its first report of the current Parliament on this matter. I have noted the Committee's recommendations that there should be no change to procedures while the experiment is in operation, and I concur with this. We have voted for an experimental period of televising. Let us have the experimental period first before we decide on any implications for our procedure.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the debate on 9 February, when the motion before the House was:

> "That this House approves in principle the holding of an experiment in the public broadcasting of its proceedings by television; and believes that a Select Committee should be appointed to consider the implementation of such an experiment".

I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to the fact that the television cameras have already been in this

[Mr. Roger Knapman]

Chamber during the proceedings of this place. I understand that it would be surprising if the State Opening were deemed not to be a proceeding for the purpose of privilege. After all, both Houses are at that time properly constituted. In those circumstances, how can the Committee study

"the implementation of such an experiment"

when the implementation has already taken place?

Mr. Wakeham: I assure my hon. Friend that the Committee, of which I am the Chairman, has not yet finished its deliberations or started to make its report. That report has to come before the House, and it has to be approved by the House before any experiment, under the terms of the resolution that my hon. Friend quoted, can be carried out by the House. I gave no permission for any television cameras to proceed, so it is not a matter for me whether any television cameras broadcast at any time.

My hon. Friend may be referring to the fact that, at the time of the State Opening of Parliament, there were some television cameras in the Chamber which were used not for the broadcasting of the State Opening but for an experiment in the lighting arrangements, which was conducted by the Committee the day before, and which had been the subject of some discussion in the House. As far as I know, those cameras were not connected to the gubbins that are necessary before they can produce the signals that can go out across the ether to the great wide world. As I understand it, they were in operation the day before and the only signal that was received was on six monitors that were in the Aye Lobby at the time.

Where did I get to?

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Do not start all over again.

Mr. Wakeham: I think that I was saying, to put it into a sentence, that we should deal with the experiment of television before we deal with the procedures of the House. The tail must not be allowed to wag the dog.

Each hon. Member will have his own particular interests and priorities in procedural matters. If they succeed in catching your eye, Mr. Speaker, I have little doubt, for example, that the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) will have something to say on the times and lengths of our sittings, the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) may remind us of the importance of arrangements for scrutinising EC documents, and the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Faulds) may be able to advise us how best to prepare ourselves for television. Other subjects, which I have not touched upon, could be raised.

Mr. Dalyell: Did the Leader of the House notice this afternoon the difficulty into which Mr. Speaker once again got as a result of this abomination of the open question? Is he going to give any views on the shortcomings of the open question? Have the Government considered whether this is a satisfactory arrangement? When we first came here, Prime Minister's questions were extremely strict and Macmillan and Home, and Wilson in his better days, would transfer any question that was not the responsibility of the Prime Minister. I submitted evidence to the Committee on this subject, and I wonder whether the Government have any reflections on it.

Mr. Wakeham: The Government are perfectly willing to agree with the wishes of the House in this matter. The Government do not have a strong view on how those matters should be dealt with. Ministers are here to answer questions and they will do their best to do so. However, the present arrangements are probably the most generally acceptable to the House. We may be a little wiser at the end of the debate, and the Procedure Committee may return to the issue.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Wakeham: This will be the last time that I give way. This debate is designed to enable people to express their views, and hon. Members can make their own speeches.

Mr. Thompson: I was interested in the point that has just been made about the televising of Parliament and the State Opening. I watched the television programme on the State Opening, so I intervene merely for information. I do not know which cameras were used, but there was a view of the Chamber including all the Benches. I do not know how that was obtained and I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider that point.

Mr. Wakeham: I am happy to consider that point, but it has nothing to do with my Committee. We did not do anything that we should not have done. Front-Bench Opposition Members who are distinguished members of that Committee can confirm that we are innocent.

I wish briefly to outline some general principles and to comment particularly on two of the principal matters dealt with in the Procedure Committee's reports which are before us tonight.

It seems to me that there are certain general questions which hon. Members on both sides of the House need to ask themselves when considering the principle and practicality of these or any other changes to our present procedures. First, will they in practice mean a more efficient scrutiny of legislation by the House? Secondly, do they respect the rights of the Opposition to probe the Government's proposals and advocate alternatives? Thirdly, can they be implemented without making unreasonable demands on the time and energies of Back Benchers? Fourthly, do they still permit a Government to "get their business" in an acceptable way? In other words, the proposals should not lay themselves open to exploitation designed to disrupt the normal proceedings of the House. Of course, a balance between these questions may need to be struck, but I believe that Members will wish to be assured that any changes in procedure will provide satisfactory answers to them.

Against that background, I turn, first, to the Committee's revised proposals for the timetabling of Government Bills in Standing Committee; and, secondly, to the proposals for major changes in the procedures for dealing with delegated legislation, and, in particular, prayers.

On timetabling, if I may remind the House, the Committee's main recommendation is that each Standing Committee should have its own Business Sub-Committee. After six sittings of the Standing Committee, the Business Sub-Committee would report to it, in the absence of "satisfactory understandings", its proposals on the date by which the Bill concerned should be reported to the House, the number of sittings required and, if appropriate, the times at which the various stages of the Bill should be concluded. Such reports would be brought before the Standing Committee for debate and decision.

I share the desire of the Procedure Committee to move towards the introduction of timetable motions, where necessary, at a time which allows for properly apportioned consideration of a Bill. In the most recent Session of Parliament, we have done our best to organise the business with this in mind, most notably with the timetable motions on the Education Reform and Local Government Finance Bills.

However, I see several difficulties with the Committee's proposals. In my view, they may be an overreaction to a comparatively limited problem. I acknowledge that, in some cases in recent years, Committee stages have led to unbalanced scrutiny—the Telecommunications Bill is an example—but such instances are comparatively rare and, as I have explained, I am trying to reduce them still further.

Moreover, it seems to me critical that decisions about the progress of individual Standing Committees and the need for timetabling should be taken and negotiated, as at present, in the context of a judgment on the progress of business in the House as a whole. I am not convinced that the proposed Business Sub-Committees would be able to take account of all the factors involved, nor is there any guarantee that the overall time spent by Back Benchers in Committee would not increase.

However, I have discussed with my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) the various ways in which individual Standing Committees might be given some formal role in bringing the progress of business in Committee to the attention of the House. I hope that these discussions can be taken further forward, so that I can bring forward practical proposals to the House. In particular, I look forward to hearing the suggestions of Opposition Members in a few minutes' time.

On delegated legislation, the Committee has put forward proposals which they hope would enable prayers to be debated and which would, as a quid pro quo to the Government, hold out the prospect of more affirmative motions being taken in Committee. In order to achieve this, the Committee proposes that any 20 Members would have the right to move at 3.30 pm that a prayer should be referred to a Standing Committee, with such motions being blockable by 20 or more other Members. A Minister, backed by a majority, would also have the power to ensure that an affirmative order was taken in Standing Committee rather than on the Floor. In other words, this would override the present blocking power of 20 Members.

Again, however, I see a number of potential difficulties with these proposals as they now stand.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wakeham: I said that I would not give way again because I want to hear everyone's views, and it is important that I get on.

Regarding the proposals on prayers, I believe that there is, again, a danger of exaggerating the problems that they are designed to address. Although I accept that a large number of prayers go undebated, as the House knows, prayers are frequently tabled for purposes other than debate. I believe that, in the majority of cases where there is a genuine widespread desire for a debate, consultations through the usual channels enable this to be arranged.

I recognise that the Liberal party—if I am allowed to call it by that name—does not get as many prayers as it would like, but, by definition, the number of Liberal Members means that they cannot always command a large number of prayers.

Mr. Beith: Surely the right hon. Gentleman knows that, when those procedures were introduced, the then Leader of the House said that time would be found for all prayers to be dabated. The test of whether a prayer should be debated is not whether a large number of Members wish to debate it, but whether it constitutes legislation and should therefore be scrutinised by the House.

Mr. Wakeham: The present arrangements are reasonably satisfactory, and those prayers which there is a widespread desire to debate are debated. I am considering a proposal in the report which I believe is not totally satisfactory. Moreover, it seems to me that the proposals whereby any 20 Members could at 3.30 block prayers from going into Committee for debate might invite regular and unproductive confrontation at this time of day. As far as affirmative orders are concerned, existing provisions mean that effectively, when the Opposition so desire, arrangements are made to take them on the Floor. Under the Committee's proposals, this provision would be lost. I do not believe that this would be acceptable either to the official Opposition or to private Members generally.

Looking at the Committee's other recommendations on delegated legislation, while I accept that debate on substantive motions on instruments in Committee would give the latter a more formal role, I suspect that this would lead to greater attention to whipping arrangements than at present and to longer hours for Committee members; so, too, would the proposal for scrapping the 11.30 "cut-off" for prayers, with the "knock-on" effect that this would have on earlier business.

Recalling to mind the general questions that I posed earlier, Mr. Speaker, I am not myself convinced that the Committee's proposals on the scrutiny of delegated legislation or on the timetabling of Bills answer them satisfactorily.

We do not live in a perfect world. It would be excellent if the House had the time to consider at length every piece of delegated legislation, every European document, every clause of every Bill, and all in the civilised hours that the hon. Member for Nottingham, North is proposing. Unless we invent some sort of time tardis, where the time available is infinitely longer than would appear from the outside parameters, then we shall have to accept that giving more time to one area of our work will restrict consideration of another.

In recent Sessions, the House has reached general agreement and taken a consequent decision on a number of procedural matters. For example, Mr. Speaker, you now have the power to call for short speeches during certain debates; steps have been taken against filibustering during Committee and Report stages; and Special Standing Committees have been incorporated into the Standing Orders of the House. Tonight's debate provides us with a useful opportunity to assess other common

[Mr. Wakeham]

ground on procedure and determine the general wishes of the House on the next priorities for action. I shall listen with interest.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I advise the House that I have no authority to impose short speeches in this debate. However, as the debate must end at 10 o'clock, I ask those who participate in it to be brief so that all hon. Members now in the Chamber may contribute to it.

7.40 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I welcome, however belatedly, the holding of the debate. I thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for the kind things that he said about me. I do not believe that it is sour grapes for me to comment that the first of the reports that we are considering this evening was published 29 months ago. With the exception of the report which was published yesterday, the remaining four reports were published not later than May 1987, in the previous Session. The House may recall that we were first promised the debate during business questions in June 1987.

I hope that the House will not think me unreasonable when I say that 14 senior Members spent many hours in Committee and in detailed research trying to produce recommendations that may drag, even at a snail's pace, some of the procedures of the House into the 20th century, not the 21st century, or even 1992. Surely the Government have a responsibility—yea, I venture to say a duty—to ensure that the House is allowed to debate our reports within a reasonable period—six months after the submission of reports. A delay of two years is an insult to those who have spent much time and effort on their work. Indeed, one member of the Procedure Committee refused to remain a member of it during the previous Parliament because he decided that its work was not considered seriously by either of the Front Benches. Perhaps I may have an assurance that that is not the position, and that in future our reports will be put promptly before the House, especially when reform of procedure is part of the recommendation.

I turn now to happier matters. I am grateful that two of the Committee's recommendations have found their way on to the statute book, as it were. The use of Special Standing Committees is now part of Standing Committee procedure, but I ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to ensure that they are used when appropriate. Since the acceptance of the procedure on 27 February 1986 —I remember the date because it is my birthday—no Bill has been referred to a Special Standing Committee. Is the procedure to be allowed to wither on the vine? The Licensing Bill, as it then was, which was considered in the previous Session, was not a highly party-political measure and it would have been ideal for the Special Standing Committee procedure, which would have enabled outside views to be heard.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the Leader of the House should tell us which of the Bills referred to in the Gracious Speech he intends to refer to a Special Standing Committee?

Sir Peter Emery: I am certain that my right hon. Friend will have heard the hon. Gentleman's sensible intervention. Perhaps we shall have an answer to his question.

I am happy that the 10-minute rule for speeches during the middle two hours of a debate has been enshrined, but perhaps the House will accept my apology, as Chairman of the Procedure Committee, with six reports before the House, for not containing my remarks within 600 seconds.

I shall try to deal with four of the main parts of the Committee's reports. The part which I consider to be the most important is the allocation of time for the consideration of a Bill in Committee and on the Floor of the House. After all, time is essential for all of us in this place. I hope that this issue will be the main consideration of those who participate in the debate when I resume my seat. Even if other matters are of importance to them, I ask hon. Members to press the Government and the Opposition to accept that the Committee's recommendations have positive merit and deserve at least an experimental period so that their workability, which has been questioned by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, can be assessed properly.

What is the history of the matter? When the Procedure Committee was established at the beginning of the previous Parliament, in March 1984, it was directed by the House to consider the passage of Bills in Committee. After considerable study the Committee reported on a procedure for the formation of a Legislative Business Committee that would assess each Bill. That Committee, if it considered that a Bill would remain in Committee for more than 40 hours, would establish a time structure to be set so that all parts of the Bill would be considered in Committee without the need of a special timetable motion to be debated and passed on the Floor of the House.

That proposal was voted down because it was considered to be too inflexible. That meant that it took a little power away from the business managers and the Whips and, audaciously, gave that power to Back-Bench Members. We now know that that is the definition of inflexibility. When we set out to whittle away the power of the Whips, the walls of Jericho are before us. The trumpets of the Procedure Committee were not strong enough.

Having analysed the vote on the issue, there was a greater turnout of the Establishment—my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, members of the Cabinet, junior Whips and all the Parliamentary Private Secretaries—than on any other three-line Whip of the Parliament. I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, for I mislead you. It was a greater turnout of the Establishment than on any other Division because it was a one-line Whip, not a three-line or two-line Whip. To safeguard "flexibility", the payroll marched into the Government Lobby three abreast. Only two members of it were absent. One was quite ill and the wife of the other was presenting him with a child.

The Procedure Committee was not discouraged. If it was, it was for only a moment. It turned the other cheek and tried to overcome the criticisms. It adopted the criteria that are now agreed with the business managers. The four main essentials in considering changes are exactly those which were outlined by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. They are as follows: will they in practice lead to a material improvement; do they leave intact the legitimate rights of the Opposition; can they be implemented without placing unreasonable extra burdens on Back Benchers; do they still permit the Government to get their business?

What is necessary for Bills that are being considered in Committee? A Committee should not waste 100 or 120 hours debating the first three or four clauses of a Bill, thereby proving its virility in its opposition to the measure, until a guillotine motion is forced on the Government. As a procedure, that is nonsense.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: How many examples of that can the hon. Gentleman place before us?

Sir Peter Emery: There are a number of examples. During each Session, between five and seven timetable motions have to be introduced. The result of that procedure means, in many instances, that half or two thirds of the Bills are never discussed in Committee. I cannot give all the statistics to the House in what must be a short speech. I merely say that the facts are set out at the back of the Committee's report. The issue has been analysed quite fully and the conclusion hits the argument that there are not many examples of the first three or four clauses of a Bill being discussed for 100 or 120 hours, for example.

Steps should be taken to try to ensure that every part of a Bill is discussed in Committee. We should not further the madness whereby amendments and clauses are discussed and voted upon hours after midnight after a normal working day. The rest of the world thinks that we are mad, or, even worse, irresponsible, in continuing with this medieval procedure. The House may take these all-night sittings seriously but the country does not, especially when we appear to be acting as prize asses.

What has the Procedure Committee recommended? The recommendation is that, after six sittings of a Bill in Committee, the Business Sub-Committee—which would be similar to that appointed after a timetable motion, but nominated at the time of the selection of the Committee—should consider whether the Bill is proceeding satisfactorily. If it is, which will be the position in nine out of 10 instances, as suggested by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), no action will be taken and the Committee will proceed in the normal way. If the Business Sub-Committee considers that there are problems, it will take only one action at the first instance, but not that inferred by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. It will decide by what date the Bill needs to be reported to the House. The Members and the Whips will then use their brilliant and historic techniques to help bring this about, with the proviso that time is found for every part of the Bill to be debated.

If that procedure has been implemented, the Business Sub-Committee will meet again after 25 hours of debate. If all is proceeding reasonably at that stage, no further action will be taken. If, however, the Bill is bogged down, the Business Sub-Committee will then, and only then, decide exactly what time shall be allocated to each part of the Bill and how that will be structured within the date required for the Bill to be reported to the House. That may require afternoon sittings, evening sittings or even sittings three days a week. However, there should be no sittings after 10 pm or after the rising of the House. In that instance, Opposition Members will know, from their experience of dealing with timetable motions, that when a Business Sub-Committee operates, the Opposition call the shots as to what should or should not be debated within the time scale. We give a specific power to the Opposition to ensure that what they want to have properly debated in Committee, as long as all parts of the Bill are debated, shall be given proper and adequate time.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: That is not so. Once the slots are allocated, any member of the Committee can filibuster or talk at length on one item so that a particular issue in that slot is not reached. That happens frequently under the present guillotine procedure. The hon. Gentleman is saying that the Government want to timetable a Bill from the start. If that is what he is after, that is totally unacceptable to the Opposition.

Sir Peter Emery: I assure the hon. Gentleman that that is the last thing that I am trying to obtain. If what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting occurs, it is within the power of the Business Sub-Committee to allocate much smaller slots than at present. There is a method within the proposal to correct that sort of thing. Having had to deal with Business Sub-Committees, I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's criticism. If his criticism is true, the Business Sub-Committee could allocate the slots to a smaller amount of time to ensure that what he suggests does not happen and that the filibuster is not used.

Two matters are very important. First, there have been no instances that the Clerk of the House can find over the past 30 years where delays caused by the Opposition in Committee have stopped a piece of legislation set out in the Queen's Speech from reaching the statute book. Nor has delay in one Bill stopped other Bills announced in the Queen's Speech from being enacted. The concept of great delays in Committee harassing the Government and stopping legislation is a false shibboleth. The only harm that does is to the sleeping habits of the Back-Bench members of that Committee.

Secondly, if the procedure that I have outlined were adopted, we would save between two and a half and three and a half days a Session on the Floor of the House. That time might be given to private Members' Bills or perhaps it would allow the House to rise a week earlier at the end of a Session. Everyone knows that the present half-day taken for a timetable motion is a complete waste of time. We no longer see it as a great parliamentary occasion. Usually the House has only a smattering of Members. There is no real heat, as there used to be 20 or 30 years ago, and time after time we hear the same speeches of noise and thunder. If ever Macbeth's lines apply outside the original script, they do to guillotine motions:

> "Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing."

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is a matter not simply of people's sleeping habits being interrupted, but that the primary job of a Committee, of scrutinising legislation, does not occur? Whole chunks of legislation go through which have never seen the light of day in Committee.

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman's intervention came at exactly the right moment in my speech. I was about to say that we should have sensibly staged debates in Committee so that a Bill can be properly and fully considered and not sent off to the Lords half-digested. That would save considerable time on the Floor of the House. We would also not have the filibuster at the start, which is useless.

More time could be saved if the second-look procedure were adopted. Under that procedure, the Government

[Sir Peter Emery]

would give undertakings to introduce amendments or reconsider specific points. The Standing Committee could be adjourned after the normal completion of the Bill and asked to sit again within three weeks to take up the points that have been outlined by the Minister. The Minister would return to deal with those points which he considered helpful. That would save those matters having to be dealt with on Report and in certain instances—for example, the Committee stage of the Housing Act 1988—a vast amount of time could be saved for the Report stage and for the House as a whole.

The first report of the Procedure Committee of Session 1986-87 recommended that a parliamentary calendar should be fixed for the dates of sittings. It must be to the benefit of Members to know exactly, more than just a few days ahead, what the schedule of the House is for Christmas and Easter even if the Government require flexibility at the end of the summer. It is no good saying, "Well, one knows approximately." If we want to make plans for constituency tours, overseas visits or to make arrangements with our families, whether the House is returning on 7 January or on any day up to 21 January is of vital importance to our engagements. The Government should be able to announce the dates for rising and returning for the Christmas and Easter recesses at the end of the Queen's Speech, even if they will not accept the full calendar arrangements set out in the report.

The report about televising the proceedings is quite clear, and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has summed it up. It is for television to adapt to ensure that Parliament is properly portrayed and presented to the viewing public. Therefore, no changes to procedure are required at this stage.

There is a great need for consideration of delegated legislation. The report on delegated legislation is detailed and specific and highlights a number of serious problems that are likely to become worse rather than better. More and more we see parliamentary draftsmen and civil servants legislating the principle of the law, but leaving the regulations—the nitty-gritty of the law—to be decided by statutory instrument, which is out of the way in 90 minutes and can be altered the following year and every subsequent year if required. That is not the way that the Procedure Committee believes that the laws of the land should be made.

As 1992 approaches and more EEC regulations come upon us, the Procedure Committee report makes detailed and specific observations. The amount of European legislation that must be considered is much greater than most hon. Members understand. It is imperative that a more effective method for our consideration of that delegated legislation is found. I urge that paragraphs 11 to 38 of the report should have a full debate and not just be shoved away. Those aspects of delegated legislation and the necessary reforms for amendments to delegated legislation require a great deal of thought.

The strong dissatisfaction about the ability of private Members' legislation to be fully considered by the House was more obvious than any other issue raised by hon. Members with the Procedure Committee. That was clear to the previous Procedure Committee and was reinforced to the present Committee. On two Mondays in the late spring, instead of having four half-days for private Members' motions, they should be transferred to two appropriate Fridays. Secondly, the longer full two days should be replaced by an allocation to private Members' Bills. The Government would lose no time and private Members would benefit.

The House should consider whether the hon. Member in charge of the first Bill on that Monday should be allowed the option of moving the suspension of the 10 o'clock rule. Of course, that could be divided against and the hon. Member would have to carry the House. Again, the Government would lose none of their allocation of time if such a motion were carried. However, that would be a way of overcoming the strong feeling that when a Bill received very strong support on Second Reading it should not be blocked by three or four strategically placed amendments on Report on a Friday. It should have the same possibility of consideration as is given to Government legislation. That is not as revolutionary as it sounds because it would apply only to two private Members' Bills each year—those which were first on the two Mondays to which they were allocated.

Mr. Alton: I welcome what the hon. Gentleman has said. Does he agree with the Bow Group's recent recommendation that the House should have the ability to formulate and move a motion to provide extra time for private Members' Bills? If it is the will of the House, after a Bill has had a Second Reading and been considered in Committee and on Report, surely it would not be unreasonable to allow the House of Commons to decide whether it wishes to allocate more time to complete the stages of that Bill.

Sir Peter Emery: I fully understand what the hon. Gentleman says. However, I have to consider the way in which the Government act. The Government act in a very predictable way. That suggestion would mean that some Government time would have to be allocated to private Members' Bills. Our suggestion involves no taking away of Government time. Therefore, it stands a better chance of being accepted by the Government than anything that would cut Government time. Obviously, hon. Members must make their own speeches.

Lastly, I wish to make two small but interesting suggestions. One is that a special or emergency Adjournment debate be allowed by the Speaker on two occasions per week for 20 minutes—a 10-minute speech and a 10-minute reply by a Minister—prior to the normal Adjournment. That would be for specific matters of considerable importance that had arisen. Some hon. Members do not like that suggestion, but it was made by the Committee.

The other suggestion is the possibility of time for private Members' motions on a Friday being split so that one is debated for three hours—rather similar to a Monday half-day—thereby allowing a second motion to be debated for two hours. That, again, would spread the availability of time for private Members.

The House will be aware that much work has been done by the Committee. I do not intend to sum up what I have said, but simply return to the most important points. If Parliament is seriously to be considered as trying to make sense of its procedure, nowhere more than upstairs in Committee is sensible change essential. We must not waste hon. Members' time in parliamentary dog-fighting, even if it is only for 50 or 70 hours—as was suggested by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House—on the first few clauses of a Bill. We must ensure that all parts of a Bill are seriously considered, debated and open to amendment before the Bill leaves the Committee. We must not sit at all hours of the day and night, to the scorn of the well-informed, the disrespect of the media, the satirical comment of the comedian, the contempt of those who wish to see good law reach the statute book, and—perhaps although of little importance—the ultimate despair of our wives. On this matter as much as any other, will the House this evening give clear guidance to the business managers?

8.2 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I cannot speak on this subject without paying a heartfelt tribute to the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), who has worked so zealously as Chairman of the Committee on which I used to serve, undeterred by the shabby way in which the Committee has been treated. He referred to the fact that the payroll vote was wheeled out on a one-line Whip to defeat some major proposals and to the fact that reports have not been debated. Through all that he kept the Committee at work producing more proposals on a wide range of subjects. The House owes him a considerable debt for the work that he has done and continues to do.

I was disappointed by the speech of the Leader of the House. After a couple of hours listening to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in public session, I thought that I had heard the most complacent of Ministers. It pains me even to imply that the Leader of the House is more complacent than the Chancellor, because I like him rather better than I do the Chancellor. However, he was totally complacent about many aspects of the procedures of the House. That can be attributed either to a lack of radical spirit or to a preference for the fact that at present the Government get their own way very nicely over far too many things.

I shall pick out some of the key points that have emerged from this great pile of reports. First, on Standing Committee procedure, the Committee produced revised proposals, after criticisms of their first proposals, designed to ensure that Bills were properly debated in Standing Committee. It is scandalous that large chunks of Bills go on to the statute book without a word of debate in Committee. The House ought not to tolerate that state of affairs, which arises at least partly because of the determination of hon. Members to demonstrate their total opposition to certain Bills. But that total opposition does not prevent their having views on what the Bills should be like if they are passed, and therefore there is a need for orderly discussion. The Government really must remove the block which, with some help from the Labour Front Bench, they have placed on sensible alternative proposals.

The Bills in the forthcoming legislative Session are enormous. For the first time I have received a Bill which runs to two volumes—the Water Bill is published in two separate volumes. There is a massive task ahead of us, and large chunks of those Bills which effect large numbers of people in Britain will never be debated in the House unless we get our procedures properly sorted out.

The proposal for Special Standing Committees was enacted by the House. It is an ideal procedure for dealing with such measures as licensing laws, Sunday trading and other issues, but it simply is not being used. I endorse the challenge of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) that the Leader of the House should say now that he is willing to submit some of the Bills in this Session to Special Standing Committees.

The Committee did some excellent work on the statutory instruments procedure. That is an even bigger scandal. Year by year legislation pours out of this place which has not been the subject of any amendment procedure, or in many cases any debate whatsoever. People outside the House have to work with such legislation. I am surprised that the Leader of the House, as a qualified accountant, has not realised what a mess can be made of legislation that is not subject to a proper parliamentary scrutiny system.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments scrutinises those statutory instruments, every one of which passes through our hands? Therefore, there is some scrutiny. Can he persuade the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) to turn up more often so that she can take part in that scrutiny?

Mr. Beith: I have not been very successful in persuading the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) of late. I did not even persuade her to join my party. However, I did the hon Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments a disservice, because that Committee examines statutory instruments, not for their merits, but for their technical competence, and it does an excellent job. However, on many occasions it draws the attention of the House to failings of statutory instruments which the House does not discuss.

When the hon. Gentlemen earlier expressed some anxiety at the idea that we might remove the block that 20 hon. Members can now place on a statutory instrument going into Standing Committee, they seemed unaware that a successful placing of that block has the effect merely of ensuring that the instrument is never debated. If the 20 hon. Members rise to stop the Bill from going upstairs, there is no obligation whatsoever on the Leader of the House ever to find time for debate on the Floor of the House.

I do not accept the Leader of the House's contention that many prayers are tabled for purposes other than debate. If hon. Members want to express an opinion on something on the Order Paper, they table a substantive motion which says what they think. They do not simply put down, "That an humble address be presented to Her Majesty." That does not convey anything to anyone. It is there because there is a reason to debate an issue.

Prayers for which no time was found are listed in the Committee's report as a percentage of prayers tabled. At one time the figure used to be nil. In 1978-79 it was 28·3 per cent. It has gone up steadily. In 1985-86 it was 69·4 per cent. It is probably more now. Nearly 70 per cent. of prayers were not debated at all. That is 70 per cent. of those statutory instruments on which hon. Members have said there ought to be a debate. It is not good enough to say that there has to be a large number of hon. Members, a whole party, or the official Opposition, seeking a debate. That is not the principle on which we legislate. As long as there is any wish in the House for some procedure to be used, legislation should be subject to a procedure. It is the making of the law of the land.

Mr. Alton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way before he leaves the question of how we go about

[Mr. Alton]

making legislation. In the same context, does he agree that the Orders in Council procedure that applies to Northern Ireland legislation is totally inadequate because it is unamendable, and therefore leaves the House with no choice other than to vote for or against that legislation at the end of a cursory one and a half hour debate? All that that leads to is a feeling of great annoyance and anger among hon. Members representing Northern Ireland.

Mr. Beith: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I omitted to say that the recommendation that there should be at least a reasoned amendment procedure in Standing Committee is very important, because it enables a Standing Committee to give a signal that something fairly fundamental is wrong which would not lead it to throw out the measure, but which puts pressure on the Government to bring forward some alternative proposals on the Floor of the House.

The Committee made a limited recommendation, which I believe to be helpful, on private Members' legislation. It was defeated by a narrow margin of six votes to five. The proposal was that the House should, in a few limited circumstances, have the power to decide to bring the matter to a conclusion. If a Bill has had a Second Reading, been through its Committee stage and been debated for a considerable time, the House should have the power to bring the matter to a conclusion. Let us take the example of the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) last Session. It brings the House into national disrepute when there has been a national debate on a major issue, the House has debated it at great length, but a decision cannot be reached because the House is incapable of giving itself time to reach a decision.

The Government do not accept any such restraint in their business. They say that they must have their business. All that was proposed was that the House should, in a few limited circumstances, have the power to decide that an important matter should be brought to a conclusion. Last year it was abortion, another year it might be freedom of information and yet another year a measure affecting the disabled. Whatever the Bill, if there has been massive public debate and the House has gone through all the procedures necessary to bring it to Report, it is ludicrous that the House should be incapable of reaching a decision.

The issue of the parliamentary calendar is probably more for the convenience of hon. Members and those who work for the House than for anyone else. It is ludicrous that we cannot predict when the House will rise at Christmas, Easter or summer. Indeed, Opposition Members might think that it would put the Government under usefully greater pressure if they had to work to a calendar. The Committee considered the Canadian example and found Members on both sides of that very divided and contentious House thoroughly happy that such a scheme had been introduced. I have checked since that visit, because there have been quite a few political alarms and excursions in Canada. Although the timetable was not fully operated in two recent years when major issues arose—most recently, the free trade issue—the Members still felt that it was good to have a timetable, even if sometimes they went outside it.

Other issues will arise. I share the Committee's view that it would be premature to make changes designed to suit television. After all, it is only an experiment and it has not yet taken place. I think that, in time, some procedures will appear strange—for example, the leader of the largest Opposition party can ask repeated supplementaries during Prime Minister's questions, but that opportunity is never available to the next largest Opposition party. So great a difference cannot arise because one party is larger in Parliament than the other. In time, I am sure that that will be seen to be an unfair procedure, but we shall see when we have had the television experiment.

The House will have to consider wider issues. We believe that the House does too much—it legislates for Scotland, Wales and the regions of England on matters that should be decided in those areas. The sooner that there is a Parliament in Scotland, for example, dealing with those matters, the better. The Government also do too much. They are an amazingly itchy-fingered Government. They cannot wait to get their fingers into every possible aspect of our lives and then legislate about it. When I first came to the House many Tory Members of Parliament said that, when they were in power, there would not be so much legislation. They said that it was just the Socialists who wanted to interfere all the time. They said that when the Conservative party was in power there would be a lighter legislative timetable—at least, after the first couple of years when they had the main legislation on the statute book. What a fallacy that has turned out to be. There are no fingers itchier than those of Government Ministers, and none more so than the Ministers of this Government. I am not sure that our people are the better for that, as they struggle to live with the laws that we so inadequately scrutinise.

8.13 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): We should be thankful that, at long last, we are having this debate. It is a serious reflection on the way that we conduct our business that not until the end of 1988 are we considering valuable reports from the Select Committee on Procedure published over a period of three to four years.

I wish to direct my remarks to the second report, published in the 1986-87 Session, on the use of time on the Floor of the House and specifically to its reference to private Members' time. That is a crucial subject for hon. Members on both sides of the House, especially when the issues that they have sought to raise are of grave concern. I refer to matters with which Governments—indeed, all Governments—have felt unable to deal, such as abortion and tampering with the human embryo, both of which are concerned with the very beginnings of human life. If Governments have neither the time nor the moral courage to grapple with momentous issues of that kind, the least we can ask is that action is taken to consider the recommendations of Select Committees which have thought long and hard on the subjects and produced recommendations. Notice must be taken of the intense feeling of many hon. Members about the way in which we conduct business of this kind.

It is incomprehensible to the public how we dilly-dally and fudge important matters. Indeed, it is incomprehensible to them how it is that a private Member's Bill, which commands an overwhelming majority in the House on Second Reading and completes its Committee stage, cannot make any further progress because of deliberate, blatant sabotage by a minority of hon. Members through the use of existing procedure. The matter was brought to a head in 1985—and one or two hon. Members have already reminded the House of this—after a private Member's motion was moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden). It followed a blatant abuse of procedure, designed to block Mr. Enoch Powell's Unborn Children (Protection) Bill. Mr. Powell had introduced his Bill in December 1984. It was given a Second Reading on Friday 15 February 1985 by a large majority of 230 to 66, and it was sent to Standing Committee. It successfully completed its Committee stage and returned to the Floor of the House to begin its Report stage on Friday 3 May, when it was the second order of the day.

The first order was a non-controversial Bill on the subject of road traffic documents, which had obtained a Second Reading on the nod and spent only five minutes in Committee. Because of a determined filibuster the debate on Mr. Powell's Bill did not begin until 1 o'clock. Mr. Powell moved the closure at 2.29 pm and a vote was taken on the hostile amendment under discussion, which the supporters of the Bill won by 157 votes to 82. There was then no further time available for the Bill—the saboteurs had achieved their purpose. The Government refused to provide the necessary additional time, so only one option was left to the Bill's supporters, who felt that the will of the House should not be thwarted by a tiny minority.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kemptown drew first place in the private Members' motions ballot and announced that he would introduce a motion to give Mr. Powell's Bill extra time. Opponents of the Bill then accused its supporters of abusing the procedures of the House, ignoring the fact that their own abuse of procedure had caused the original problem. Once more, the will of the House was thwarted when, on 7 June, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) moved the writ for the Brecon and Radnor by-election and a number of Members presented petitions of a similar nature, one after the other. The private Members' motion debate was adjourned at 2.30 pm after just 15 minutes of debate. That was scandalous, and many hon. Members expected the Select Committee to deal with the matter in a realistic way.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): As a new and inexperienced Member, I must say that many people of all politics and none in my constituency have said that they wonder how we can continue screaming and yelling at each other at Question Time. I have not been approached on any one issue by more people, including those who disagreed with the Life movement and with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on the issue of abortion. People wonder how the House of Commons can stand by and allow itself to be sat on by a minority of people making a mockery out of its procedures. It is an insult to democracy.

Sir Bernard Braine: My hon. Friend speaks straight from the heart. He is right.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There have been several attacks on the procedures of the House because of the recent Bill on abortion. Will you confirm that throughout the period when that private Member's Bill was pursued in the House the Standing Orders and procedures of the House were followed? There was no abuse of procedure; there was simply a following of procedure. To attack the procedure as being an abuse is, in fact, an implicit attack on whoever is occupying the Chair, including yourself, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I must say on that matter that the procedures were properly carried out. There was no abuse in those terms.

Sir Bernard Braine: If the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) had asked me that question through you, Mr. Speaker, I would have given him exactly the same answer. I am complaining about arrangements which caused consternation outside the House and the kind of reaction to which my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) referred. Not only were people complaining to their Members of Parliament, but most of us who were known to be worried about it were receiving vast numbers of letters, and some right hon. and hon. Members had to face demonstrations in and outside their constituencies. There was intense anger about this issue all over the country. My hon. Friend was absolutely right. We witnessed a skilful use of existing weaknesses in our procedure. This debate is to direct attention to those weaknesses and, if possible, to get them remedied.

The Select Committee made some recommendations which I hope will be accepted by the House, namely, Nos. 22 and 23. The latter is extremely important. I am referring to like petitions, one after another, which are presented to take up the time of the House. The Committee, at paragraph 68, said:

> "The right to petition is undoubted."

That is a reference to the disgraceful episode on 7 June 1985, but it went on to recommend:

> "if presentation of petitions has not been concluded by 10 am on a Friday when private Members' bills are taken any further petitions set down for that day should be presented, as on other days of the week, immediately before the moving of the adjournment for the purpose of bringing the sitting to a conclusion."

If that recommendation were adopted now, there could not be a repetition of what happened in 1985. My complaint is that we are now in 1988 and nothing has been done about behaviour which caused intense anger up and down the country from supporters of all political parties. It is inevitably the only issue upon which the members of the Ulster Unionist party and the Nationalist Opposition in Northern Ireland are completely agreed. It is a matter which brings together hearts and minds across the political divide. It must not be treated in a trivial fashion. It is high time that the House spoke its mind on the subject, which it has not been given the opportunity to do until now.

I would suggest, too, that a private Member whose Bill is first in the debate on a private Members' day should be empowered to move the indefinite suspension of the rule to provide for unlimited debate after 10 pm. It may be argued that, once a proposal of that kind is made, it could lead to all-night sittings, but I do not think so. In the main, the House is composed of reasonable people. The mere threat of a filibuster would soon be removed by the suspension of the 10 o'clock rule. Working on the assumption that each group of amendments would take one and a half hours to debate, it would take a large selection of amendments to force the House to sit all night.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): Are not filibusters which occur on the Floor of the House far more likely to occur in the middle of the night than before 10 o'clock? If there is a suspension of the 10 o'clock rule, it is likely that there

[Mr. William Powell]

will be some very long filibusters by hon. Members who are opposed to the measure that its supporters are trying to advance.

Sir Bernard Braine: Let us make some progress in the matter. Of course, one can raise objections of that kind, but I feel that, once it is seen that the House wishes action to be taken, the message will be received.

Mr. Alton: I entirely agree with what the right hon. Gentleman has been saying. The truth is that there would be votes on closures after one and a half hours, whether it was in the middle of the night or at any other time, and the House could then make progress. Does he agree that it brings us into disrepute when 296 Members can give a Bill a Second Reading, and we can spend 30 hours considering matters in Committee—and we even completed our debate on Report of my own private Member's Bill—but then, in the middle of voting on Report, the clock can strike 2.30 pm and prevent the House from taking any further decision? Does he agree that that makes a mockery of the word "democracy"?

Sir Bernard Braine: Of course, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) is right, and I would advise my dear friend to note that he is a former Chief Whip. I have been here for many years and I have served in Committees all through the night, so I know how the system works. I feel that it is disgraceful for the House to be embroiled, as it has been, by such filibustering within the rules. I believe that, if we made these simple reforms, the message would be delivered. However, there are ways and means of dealing with those who seek to speak right through the night.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I have listened to the Father of the House and I am getting his message very clearly. However, it appears that he is basing his argument on one Bill, because that Bill was controversial. There were many hon. Members in the Chamber on that day, and I believe that Members speak in the House on behalf of their constituents. When they want to get in, they contribute. I contributed for 23 minutes the other night because I believed that it was necessary. So the filibustering, as the right hon. Gentleman suggests, is a load of rubbish.

Sir Bernard Braine: I shall not pursue that. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), for whom normally I have considerable affection, is entitled to his opinion.

Mr. Alton *rose*——

Sir Bernard Braine: No, I shall not give way. Other hon. Members wish to contribute and I wish now to move to my conclusion.

I want to make a subtle suggestion to my right hon. Friend. I believe that my proposal would assist the Government because it would prevent them from being pressurised—often by their Back Benchers—as they have been and as they will be in the future if there is no reform, into finding additional parliamentary time for a particular Bill. It would also enable the Government to remain strictly neutral towards that Bill. I suggest that the matter should be left to the good sense of the House. For example, since 1975 the majority of hon. Members have wanted to see an end to late abortion and also to abortion virtually on demand, which the supporters of the 1967 Act claimed was never their intention to encourage. It is an outrage that a group of hon. Members who sought to amend the law, in keeping with the original intention of Parliament in 1967, should be denied that right by outdated and undemocratic procedures. It is time for good sense and fairness to prevail. It is time for change.

8.29 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Before offering any comments on the procedural reforms before the House, I must express the view that the arrival of television, which is a development that I have opposed and still oppose, will precipitate a whole series of procedural reforms.

The Procedure Committee's reforms that we are examining tonight were all arrived at without any informed consideration of the advent of television, because we were not in a position to do that. A number of the proposed reforms that we have made would have been markedly different if they had been considered in the context of televised proceedings. My view, and I have expressed it in the Procedure Committee, is that, on a number of fronts, we should suspend the amendment of procedure pending the completion of the six-month trial period—if that ever takes place. I hope that it will not.

Our second report of 1985-86 dealt with the allocation of time. I believe that timetabling is correct. From a former position of supporting delay in Committee as a tactic—probably, in truth, it was no more than an inability to budget my own time effectively following my first election to the House—I have moved to a position of outright opposition to the tactic. It is a meaningless and senseless exercise. It is a delusion because, in practice, the Whips have complete control of the timetable. We never create a major obstruction to the Government's programme by using such tactics. Over the years I have sat on many Standing Committees and I have never seen a Bill delayed beyond the date set by the Government. Furthermore, few outside even know what is happening, apart from the lobbies, union observers and too-easily-impressed party activists who are duped into believing that some importance is attached to the exercise.

It is important to retain the right to delay on Report. The loss of a day on Report, or even an overnight debate, is invariably well reported. It is an indication of effective opposition, whether it be a Government rebellion or an Opposition attack. It shows Parliament at its best.

Since the Select Committee last examined the question of shorter speeches, the House has resolved to allow access to television. There can be no doubt that this development will result in demands from Back Benchers for television exposure. For a start, regional coverage of activities on the Floor will turn out to be far more important than national coverage, certainly for the mere mortals amongst us. There will be a marked shift in the weighting of speeches from national to local concerns. The incidence of national coverage for the average Back Bencher will be minimal, whereas regional coverage will become extensive, if only because it offers cheap television for the new franchises under the financial pressure in the new round.

Hon. Members will be in search of a slot, and that can only mean far greater numbers of Members in search of Floor time, and therefore heavy lists for the Speaker to consider. Pressure for shorter speeches is inevitable, and the arrangements approved on 27 February 1986 will be seen as minimal concessions.

The extension of the restriction on Second Readings to full Opposition day debate and full day debates on Government motions has been the subject of an order for the past two Sessions. The Select Committee has proposed the adoption of a permament Standing Order, but I do not believe that that recommendation goes far enough.

There is no reason why nearly all speeches should not be subject to the 10-minute restriction, apart from those by party spokesmen or those by Members moving motions, amendments or new clauses. Such a restriction could endure for most of the parliamentary day from the commencement of public business to the commencement of the Adjournment debate. Such a restriction could be perceived by some as unreasonable and burdensome. However, we should recall that the Speaker would have discretion and, on the desired proportion of our business that was not the subject of pressure, he or she could exercise that discretion.

The only area of difficulty is the Report stage of a Bill. I believe that such business should be exempt from procedural restriction. The Report stage could be the subject of self-regulation prompted by the Whips, who, under conditions of televising, will acquire substantial new influence over events.

Paragraph 5 of the Committee's third report of 1985-86 entered some interesting observations on the value of interventions and the use of prepared speeches. Prepared speeches in the form of written statements, such as the one that I am giving tonight, which are read into the record will make for poor television. I am sure that that will mean changes for many hon. Members.

Interventions are much more of a problem, because they are often crucial to effective debate. I have thought long and hard on this matter and have concluded that, if we do have a 10-minute limit, speakers should not be penalised because of interventions. They should be awarded additional time, perhaps as much as a minute or two. At this stage this proposition may seem a bit sloppy, but I can only reiterate the view that if television comes in it will transform the Chamber and the nature of debate.

I also agree with the recommendation to wind up business in Committee at 10 pm, for the reasons outlined.

The other principal recommendation, which provides for the use of a Business Sub-Committe to fix a "fair terminal date", is extremely complicated. I am not sure that it would work in practice. The proposition appears to provide for a series of negotiated and renegotiated target "terminal dates" for proceedings in Standing Committee. I believe that the terminal date timetabling of Bills, under an alternative option that I am proposing, could be negotiated at Chief Whip level—dependent on arrangements—and, if necessary, occasionally with official Opposition and Government spokesmen in attendance.

The agreement could then be referred to the Business Sub-Committee as proposed in the report for the timetabling of clauses. The cynic, indeed the realist, may argue that the effect of giving the Business Sub-Committee overall control of the "terminal date" would still, under my system, leave the Whips in charge of negotiations and recommendations to Committee. If that is the case, why go through the motions of the Select Committee's recommendations?

On a number of occasions I have referred to the rights of Privy Councillors. Our third report of 1985-86 on shorter speeches failed to tackle the question of the rights of Privy Councillors. According to my informants who were on the Committee at that time, the matter was not even raised during the deliberations.

Sir Bernard Braine: It was.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Forgive me if I am wrong.

Nevertheless, consideration of this matter is an important issue in the light of televising the House. Some of us refuse to accept that Members without portfolios who are Privy Councillors have any greater right to be called in debate than others who equally lack portfolios. I doubt that they have the right even to be called earlier.

With the advent of television, this matter will acquire a new importance. Some of us, certainly I for one, will set about restructuring that privilege. We shall use procedure to secure its removal. I believe that the ending of the privilege will come through an initiative in the Procedure Committee in response to pressure on the Floor of the House. This matter should equally surface as an item on the agenda to be considered by the Select Committee on Televising of Proceedings of the House, as it relates to fair play in the allocation of time and opportunities to Members. If my nomination to the Select Committee on Televising of Proceedings of the House had not been blocked, I should have dealt with that matter.

My soundings among Conservatives do not suggest any great support for this form of Member advantage and privilege. In fact, a number of Conservatives have privately expressed to me their concern about the possible abuse of Privy Councillor privilege on their Benches. One Conservative Back Bencher referred to a Privy Council hoard on his Benches, comprised of people who are not the Prime Minister's most impassioned admirers.

Some of my cynical hon. Friends might say, "Leave it to them." That has never been my view. The whingeing right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) has never done a blind bit of good for the Labour party. On the contrary, he has only served to convince liberal Tories that they still have a voice at Westminster. Certainly such dissidents grab the headlines and make it more difficult for the Opposition to be seen to be spearheading opposition. I conclude with the view that Privy Councillors will fight hard to defend the indefensible, but they must be beaten.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): It seems wrong that there is no equality among right hon. and hon. Members. Being a very junior Member I have less chance of speaking on behalf of my constituents, even though they are clearly as important as those of a Privy Councillor.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: We are all born equal and should all be treated as equals in this Chamber. The problem is that we are not, and I do not blame you, Mr. Speaker, for that—it is precedent.

I turn to public Bill procedure. Apart from the question of timetabling, there is in the second report of 1984-85 a number of recommendations awaiting debate. Among them is one for reconvening Standing Committees to dispense of undertakings given by Ministers—to which reference was made by our Chairman, and I may say that he has been a very good Chairman—and for the approval of consequential and drafting amendments. It was felt that

[Mr. Campbell-Savours]

the recommendation for reconvening Standing Committees would reduce the amount of business to be dealt with on Report.

No doubt there are times when such an arrangement would be helpful, but at others it could be positively unhelpful to the House, which, wishing to debate highly important and contentious legislation, might find that Mr. Speaker's selection of amendments denied debates on issues that the Government had carefully manoeuvred into Committee and possibly away from the cameras.

I come now to the parliamentary calendar. I have few words to express on the subject, having been elected to the Select Committee on Procedure after its consideration. I admit to prejudice against the Canadian precedent that the Committee examined. The position in respect of the Scots must be mentioned. It is untenable, and the recommendation in paragraph 3 of the first report 1986-87 that the House should rise not later than 21 July would be a useful and much needed procedural reform. However, not even that would fully deal with the problems of Scottish Members. The timing of party conferences precludes the earlier resumption of hostilities at the end of the summer recess, but that need not be the case. We have the opportunity to reform, and paragraphs 8, 9 and 10 of the report argue the case very persuasively.

As to use of time on the Floor of the House, the report makes reference to private Members' Bills procedure and the availability of time to right hon. and hon. Members wishing to raise matters of a topical nature. The House will not need much prompting to recognise my objectives. Although it may be said that there are times when a Labour-sponsored private Member's Bill could benefit from the prolonged debate that our proposals recommend, the present position is outrageous—although I fully understand that the beneficiaries of such a procedural warp may feel pleased with the current arrangements. However, in all natural justice they are defending the indefensible.

The argument surfaced in the Committee in all its dishonesty. It had more to do with the arguments about abortion and the embryo than about parliamentary procedure. Those right hon. and hon. Members who sat on the Committee know what I am talking about. It does not augur well for objective discussion of Back-Bench power. When that matter is finally debated on the Floor of the House, I suspect that matters will take a similar turn. It will be interesting to know the position taken by the Leader of the House. Will he propose a reasonable and just approach, defending the rights of Back Benchers in the finest traditions of the House of Commons, or will he oppose our recommendations for tactical reasons? On the last occasion, he always seemed to bring, bear or carry the will of the Prime Minister on these matters to the House of Commons. I am not convinced that he is utterly objective. I know that he will object to my comments, but that remains my view, and I am sure that I am correct.

I understand my own party's difficulty, but hope that the shadow Cabinet will resolve not to oppose but to ignore the recommendation in question and will remain neutral—if it is necessary for the shadow Cabinet to take a decision. Such an approach may not be in the finest traditions, but we should beware of spurious opposition. As the Committee points out in paragraph 61, the Government's progress with Bills is not terminated by Big Ben at 10 o'clock; they simply table a motion to suspend the 10 o'clock rule. No matter what the strength of opposition, the Government are likely to clear the Report stage without much difficulty.

A switch from Friday to Monday for private Members' Bills could possibly secure for them an additional one and a half hours' debate or more. The four half days otherwise given over to private Members' Bills under present arrangements would be consolidated into two full Friday debates. It will be seen from the report that discussion took place on the right of a right hon. or hon. Member to move a business motion at 2.30 pm, providing for additional time after 10 o'clock on private Members' Bills on Mondays. That would transform the chance of a Bill clearing the hurdle of the Report stage. It would mean all-night debates on two private Members' Bills if there had been resistance to their passage, but if there are heated arguments on private Members' Bills, why should the House not sit all night on Monday? If that is the time that it takes to debate contentious legislation, and if it occurs only once or twice a year, we should be willing to afford that time. I say to my right hon. and hon. Friends that we are willing to turn up if we can debate a Report stage overnight and attempt to delay the introduction of legislation and bust the 2.30 pm timetable for the following day. If the motivation exists to do that, it should equally exist to allow proper debate of contentious issues.

Sir Peter Emery: Will the hon. Gentleman make it clear that, in order to do that, a right hon. or hon. Member must still carry his motion with majority support in a Division? It is not a simple matter, but, in fairness, a right hon. or hon. Member must have the support of the House for such a motion.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I shall omit another point that I had wished to raise and turn to the matter of prime time and debating opportunities, which is also dealt with in the second report of 1986-87.

Televising the House has wide implications for prime time. The organisation of Back Benchers on theme issues will require the development of considerable expertise in the Whips' Office. I feel sure that it will respond positively. The Opposition's Whips' Office will certainly do so, just as I expect that of the Government will. I understand that the Select Committee on Televising of Proceedings of the House visited Canada to see for itself the one-minute speech procedure. I am led to believe that it is appalling and trivialises issues. However, there is a need for a slot to privide an opportunity for important and topical issues to be raised briefly. The use of the Standing Order No. 20 procedure is an indication of the demand, and that is recognised in the report.

The problem is that the report has produced an ineffective compromise. It provides for two additional Adjournment debates each week, but at what cost? I foresee the loss of private notice questions and of statements in prime time in favour of mini-Adjournment debates answered by Ministers in low-profile time after 10 o'clock, and without the right to question the Minister. The danger is to be found where the recommendation refers to "topical concern" and dissatisfaction with replies, enabling "notice" to be given "for the following day". I alert my colleagues to the danger inherent in that new procedure, which could prove disastrous for Back Benchers. My inclination is to oppose it, although I shall listen with interest to any counter arguments.

The House wil note that I entered a caveat in the form of an amendment to the report. Again, I failed. Some hon. Members not of my political view may have seen advantage. Also among the amendments tabled was my counter proposition, which extracted no support. My amendment did not provide for a ministerial response. I argued that in granting a five-minute Adjournment debate Mr. Speaker could by practice call a Conservative Back Bencher last in the debate. He or she would act as a sweep.

That approach might be novel, but it would certainly have a marked effect on late-night debates, helping to keep the Government on their mettle and fully accountable. It would provide an excellent opportunity for regional television, in an odd way helping to reassert the national context in which the House debates in ordinary time by providing a regional slot, but it would also prevent Ministers from going to the Dispatch Box on what would in effect be 24 or 48-hour notice debates. I believe that you, Mr. Speaker, would find pressure being exerted on you not to grant PNQs, but to ensure that they fell within the mini-Adjournment debates.

I have spoken for 19 minutes. Perhaps I have overshot my time, but I should have liked to talk about a number of other matters. I hope that no precipitate action will be taken, and that no procedural reforms will be introduced in the coming months before the television cameras come in. If television is allowed in, it will transform this place. We shall oppose it, but if introduced it might mean very different reforms.

8.48 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): More than three and a half years after the Select Committee on Procedure produced its report "Public Bill Procedure", we are not debating motions to implement any part of it. Once again we are debating on a motion to adjourn; sometimes it is a motion to take note. Three weeks ago, our report was not even available when I tried to obtain a copy. I see that it has been hastily reproduced in almost legible condition by some process other than printing, presumably for this debate, but that is an indication of how much time has already passed since its production.

Some years ago, Mr. Speaker, I asked the Accountant of the House who authorised the expenditure of Select Committees taking evidence outside Westminster but within the United Kingdom. As he could not give me the answer, the matter went to your predecessor, Mr. Speaker Thomas. He and the Accountant had to fall back on a "take note" motion—not a motion to approve—concerning a Procedure Committee report of many years ago. That is the state to which our proceedings have deteriorated. It is lamentable that, even after such a lapse of time, there should be no proposals on which the House can make a decision.

Much emotional energy has been expended on private Bill procedure. I think that an aspect of the fate of the Abortion (Amendment) Bill has a lesson for us. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who was strongly in favour of the Bill, said that it received a large majority on Second Reading. So it did, but not in the form in which it went on Report. You, Mr. Speaker, were put in an impossible position. The Standing Committee had inserted a provision which, had it been in the Bill on Second Reading, might have prevented it from receiving a Second Reading. Under that provision, if a woman had been impregnated in the course of a rape, she could nevertheless be denied an abortion.

I understand the position in which you found yourself, Mr. Speaker. If you had given the House the opportunity to debate a provision that many regarded as iniquitous, it would have meant selecting another amendment. You would then have been accused in certain quarters of killing the Bill by selecting too many amendments. On the other hand, not to debate that provision—to which the House had never agreed on Second Reading—meant that time was running out without any possibility of debating a crucial provision. The sponsors and supporters of the Bill never referred to that when they appeared on television saying how abusive were the proceedings of the House. The promoters of private Members' Bills need to adopt a discipline: all the major ingredients should be in a Bill when it is presented for its Second Reading. Such tricks should not be played on the House.

The composition of the Standing Committee reflects the vote on Second Reading. A favourable Committee can be obtained if provisions on which a majority would not be obtained are not put in before the Committee stage. The House is then denied the opportunity of debating a major provision on the last possible occasion before Third Reading. In such circumstances, among those who are put in an impossible position is the occupant of the Chair.

Sir Bernard Braine *rose*——

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: I shall not give way to the Father of the House. Too much time—and time is running out —has been spent in discussing the Abortion (Amendment) Bill, although it was necessary for me to allude to it because it illuminates an aspect of private Bill procedure.

Sir Bernard Braine: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: I shall give way when I reach the moment to do so, which has not yet arrived.

The Abortion (Amendment) Bill illuminates the obligations that must repose with those who put forward private Members' Bills within whatever constraints of time apply—and there will always be constraints. I shall now give way to the Father of the House.

Sir Bernard Braine: My hon. Friend must not mislead the House. He made a perfectly sound point in his general observations about a different Bill coming to the House at a later stage, but he was wrong in this instance. The Bill's sponsors had decided to take note of speeches made on Second Reading which asked for the Bill to be amended. The amendments were moved by sponsors of the Bill, the aim being to bring back to the House a Bill that had taken account of views expressed on Second Reading. To that extent, the Bill might be regarded as having been improved; it was certainly more sensitive to the feelings of the House. It is wrong to suggest that Mr. Speaker was put in an impossible position. Mr. Speaker presides over a legislative process that allows for amendment.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: If new provisions of a highly contentious nature are inserted into a private Members' Bill in Committee, the sponsors must be naive beyond all

[Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop]

possibility if they do not realise that they are going to present the Chair on Report with an impossible dilemma —a dilemma of their making.

I now leave private Members' Bill procedure because I am concerned about the three-and-a-half-year-old report on public Bill procedure that we can just read in its present form. We suggested that there should be more use of Special Standing Committees. That is because the House often legislates on technical matters, with its mind unclouded by knowledge. That is why the Procedure Committee recommended the introduction of that procedure in the first place.

It is one thing to have the procedure—extant as a possibility in Standing Orders—but it does not do anybody very much good if the Government do not make use of the procedure that is extant in Standing Orders. My plea is that it should be more used. I believe that the time spent in Standing Committee on a Bill would then be more tightly focused and more productive, as it would produce good legislation that did not have unintended consequences.

One of the objectives of a Standing Committee on a Bill is to ensure that the Bill achieves the consequences that were intended and does not have consequences that were unintended. One of the virtues of the Special Standing Committee procedure is that those who are more familiar with the subject matter that will be affected by the legislation can give the benefit of their advice, not expressed in party political terms, to the House as a whole. That will also be of benefit in Committee and on Report.

I turn to a much more recent report—only a year and a half old—entitled "Use of Time on the Floor of the House". There is an old adage that nature abhors a vacuum; but nature also gives way to pressure that it cannot sustain. Unless we make more provision for dealing with urgently contentious matters, there will be abuse of the points of order procedure. We know that there has been such abuse. The Procedure Committee's objective would be not to pretend that that abuse would go away, but to see how it could reasonably be accommodated without imposing on the House and those who serve it in so many capacities an even greater and unreasonable prolongation of our sittings.

Our proposal in paragraph 76—that twice a week there should be a short emergency debate chosen by you, Mr. Speaker—was a reasonable attempt to give to the House an alternative to spurious points of order. To those who would reject it, I am bound to say, "What would you put in its place, other than abusing the rules of order?" The pressure is there for all to see and hear. If your Committee's very modest recommendation is to be rejected, Mr. Speaker, it must, in my view, only fairly be rejected in favour of a better alternative, not in favour of nothing whatever.

Reference has already been made to a number of other aspects, but other hon. Members want to speak in the debate, which is already two thirds gone. Therefore, I must ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, whose interest in procedure I know to be authentic, to give us time to take decisions about procedural matters, rather than just to debate them either on a take-note basis or in Adjournment debates. At the end of the day, however, I have this baleful message for him. However often the Select Committee on Procedure sits to try to find ways by means of which the House does not sit at ridiculous hours, when it cannot perform its task appropriately or efficiently, and however many reports it produces, we shall be swamped by legislation unless there is discipline over the introduction of legislation. That, I am afraid, follows, and it is something that only the Cabinet can remedy. It is not within the control of Back-Bench Members of the House.

I used the word "legislation" because about 15 years ago I introduced a Bill, the Amendment of Statutory Instruments Bill. Each year I have weighed on the kitchen scales the bound volumes of Acts of Parliament of the last Session and the bound volumes of statutory instruments. The latter got remorselessly heavier as compared to the former, as well as in absolute terms. The proportion of our legislation which the House is powerless to alter increases each year. Nothing will convince me that it is not the least skilful parliamentary draftsmen who are put on to drafting secondary legislation, because they know that their Minister will not have to defend it against amendments in Committee. Naturally, the more skilled ones are put on to drafting Bills, and the less skilled on to statutory instruments. The absolute bottom of the bucket are put on to drafting legislation subject to the negative resolution procedure, which will probably never come before the House at all for shortage of time.

The House will not have done its task, however hard its Select Committee works, until it grasps the nettle of having a process for amending statutory instruments. Therefore, our first tentative step towards that is recommending a reasoned amendment to be within the power of the appropriate Statutory Instrument Committee. It is a tiny step and a halting one, but for heaven's sake, let us take it.

9.6 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I agree with the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) about the desirability of the House being able to amend statutory instruments. That would be very helpful when we are trying to redress power.

I pay tribute to the work of the Procedure Committee, but it is sometimes too concerned with formal procedures and has not paid enough attention to the informal procedures which run parallel to the formal ones. Members of the Committee have illustrated that tonight by complaining that there has been no opportunity to debate their reports in the House.

Members of the Procedure Committee, almost all of whom are here, with a small number of others, must understand that, if we are to amend the House's procedures, we have to ensure that all 650 Members are involved. Although at least one of the Select Committee's reports is out of print and difficult to get hold of, my impression is that most hon. Members have not looked at its reports. Speaking to a cross-section of hon. Members this week to find out what was to be debated tonight and their views on the subject did not lead to enlightenment for me.

The first problem for the Procedure Committee is to ensure that its reports are fully debated in the informal atmosphere in the House before there is a formal debate. I fear that, with many of its proposals, it has not overcome that first hurdle and got a majority of hon. Members to consider what it proposes.

I am a little worried about the parliamentary calendar. An informal calendar already exists, but the problem will not be solved by making it formal. The problem is that the calendar is wrong. If we make the informal calendar formal, we will solve nothing. We will merely give the Opposition an opportunity to say, "We fought very hard and we have wrecked the calendar again this year." That is not much use. The fundamental thing to which the report draws attention is the view that the House should not sit in July.

We ought to recognise, particularly as the average age of hon. Members has got younger, that hon. Members ought to have the right to go away on holiday with their families in July and not have to take their children away from school. The problem is especially acute in Scotland. It is not a matter of a formal or informal calendar, but of the House having the will to reorganise its time so that it does not sit in that part of July.

I now turn to the question whether we should timetable Bills from the start. Let us be clear that, at present, the right to timetable Bills rests with the Opposition when the Bill starts off. In my experience, the Opposition make a good attempt to timetable the Bill effectively. Although it has been argued that some long Bills have gone through the House with discussion on only the first one or two clauses, I believe that, on the whole, those are exceptions. If one looks at the political content of such a Bill, one realises that most of the political issues can be debated on the early clauses. The majority of Bills that go through the House—having been timetabled in effect by the Opposition—go through with reasonable scrutiny, considering the difficulties.

If we chose to have early timetabling for Bills, a series of abuses might arise. I have served on a large number of Committees and I have found amendment races particularly obnoxious. It is important that we should debate amendments at the right place in the Bill. If one has a timetable for amendments, there is a race to table the first amendment. If one tables an amendment to clause 27, for example, and the amendment says, "Insert at the beginning of the clause 'subject to subsection (1)(a)'", someone else will try to table an amendment that will be debated even earlier and that does not lead to orderly debate.

It would be a retrograde step for the House if, as a matter of principle, responsibility for timetabling Bills was handed over from the Opposition to, in effect, the Government. If a Committee which had a majority of Government Members was appointed to timetable Bills, that is what we would be doing. If the Procedure Committee was suggesting that the responsibility should be handed over to a Committee composed of a majority of Opposition Members, I would not complain, but I am sure that Ministers would not be happy with that. I should not be happy about giving the Government more power over timetabling.

I shall now deal with the Committee's report on early-day motions. It seems that the House has not been well served by some of the trivial early-day motions that have appeared on the Order Paper, but the main point is that early-day motions are a public way of reflecting the informal activities of the House. It is not easy to tell constituents that one has had a word with the Minister and pressed the point: it does not sound convincing. Putting one's name on an early-day motion is a simple process, but it is a way of giving some form to the series of informal processes that go on in the House. We often talk about the Division Lobbies, the Members' Lobby and Central Lobby, but we should realise that much of the process of Parliament is the informal lobbying that goes on. Early-day motions offer an opportunity for a formal way of dealing with that informal activity. That is not too high a price to pay.

It was suggested earlier that hon. Members who are suspended should suffer a longer period of suspension than that which is normally imposed. We should be careful about that, because, if suspensions were longer, we should be using the majority in the House to censure individual Members. Hon. Members should be accountable to their constituents and not too firmly accountable to the majority in the House. If suspensions were longer, they would be far more controversial and would cause more problems.

I ask the Leader of the House to use the Special Standing Committee procedure more frequently. I suggest that the forthcoming legislation on children would be a good opportunity to use that procedure.

I welcome the opportunity to amend statutory instruments. At present, we are too often prepared to put into primary legislation the power for the Secretary of State to do things by order and by regulation. If the House were less willing to give Ministers that power in the first place, fewer problems would develop.

Finally, I should like the Leader of the House to think about the problems that occur with statements, especially if our proceedings are to be televised. It is not a satisfactory procedure for embargoed copies of White Papers and other documents to be given out to the lobby and to other newspaper correspondents, sometimes 24 hours beforehand and often on the morning of the day on which the statement is to be made, and then for Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen and minority parties to receive the same statements and documents perhaps just half an hour or an hour before the statement is made, but no other Members being able even to get hold of a copy until after the statement has been made.

If it is reasonable for journalists to be sufficiently briefed on matters so that they can write about them for the following morning's newspapers, it is reasonable that hon. Members should have the same opportunity to read the documents and ask questions about them. There is the procedure of the statement being given in the House, but there is often a wait of several weeks or months—sometimes even years—before there is a further opportunity to discuss those matters. It should be possible for hon. Members to receive such documents on at least the same terms as journalists.

There should be far more debate about most of the proceedings of the Select Committee on Procedure. Such debate should occur in an informal atmosphere first, and once there is a clear majority in the House for change, we should proceed with the legislation. We should not bemoan the fact that such things are not debated on the Floor of the House. What we should bemoan is the fact that the Procedure Committee has not convinced sufficient hon. Members to take an interest in its reports for there to be a full and frank informal debate before we get to the stage at which we should vote.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I have been busy this evening, which is why I missed the first part

[Mr. Tony Banks]

of the debate. I have been trying to win Weybridge for the Labour party, which is why I wrote to you. Could you appeal to hon. Members to make their contributions brief so that I can get in?

Mr. Speaker: I was about to rise to my feet when the hon. Gentleman gazumped me to say that I understand that the shadow Leader of the House will seek to catch my eye at about a quarter to 10. Quite a number of hon. Members have not yet spoken—some of whom served on the Committee—but I think it is quite important in such a debate that Members who did not serve on the Committee are also called to speak so that we may have their views as well.

9.17 pm

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): I hope that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) will forgive me if I do not follow too closely the specific points that he made. This is one of our more interesting debates, in which the currents of controversy move not across the Floor of the House like forked lightning, but up and down the Benches on either side rather like sheet lightning. The balance of opinion is sometimes rather interesting, if much more difficult to predict than usual. I shall resist the temptation to enter into the important, but in some ways private, fight that the Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir. B. Braine), has reinstated this evening.

However, I shall permit myself one reflection on the important procedural point that has been discussed in considerable depth. If the exploitation of procedure within the rules of order—it must always be within the rules of order because that is a fundamental premise—to oppose legitimate proposals, whether in the form of legislation or otherwise, is to be ruled out, we face a difficult problem. Naturally, like so many other hon. Members of all parties, I dislike such exploitation whenever it occurs. Furthermore, the public do not understand it and I do not think that they will ever. We must be extremely careful before we tighten the straitjacket of procedure on this House so severely that the patient—in this case Parliament —is suffocated. Having said that, I realise that to some extent I am undermining my own case on a number of the other points that I hope to make as briefly as I can.

I am sure that the whole House is grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) for his report—indeed, for all his serious reports. I have read most of them this afternoon and find myself in considerable agreement with a large proportion of their recommendations.

I share the regret of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) that we are not debating specific proposals placed before the House for decision. As is so often the case, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House showed his usual courtesy and consideration and raised a fundamental point about procedure—the behaviour of hon. Members. My perspective is nowhere near as long as that of the Leader of the House or as long as that of many other hon. Members, but perhaps it is a little longer than the perspective of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

A long perspective does not necessarily confer authority, except in your case, Mr. Speaker, because you sit in the House for thousands of hours a year. Perhaps you spend more time in it than any other hon. Member, and therefore your perspective gives you special authority. Within the last few years the standard of behaviour in the House has declined. There has been a decline in courtesy, in good manners and, perhaps, a decline in that rarest of all commodities in this Chamber, wit.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Sir Ian Lloyd: The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is an exemplar of wit.

Mr. Banks: I have with me a book by Sir Alexander Mackintosh entitled, "Echoes of Big Ben." It says:

> "I trembled for the fame and fate of Parliament as I witnessed the extremely violent, disgraceful scene, in July, 1893, of hon. Members hitting each other."

The hon. Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) has been in the House for a long time. Can he tell us when hon. Members last hit each other? That certainly puts into perspective the rather eccentric behaviour of my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) who left the House earlier today describing hon. Members as disciples of Onan and making strange gestures to Mr. Speaker.

Sir Ian Lloyd: Hon. Members hitting each other is not within my experience, and I hope that it will never be. It is always a little dangerous to quote from a decade in which, I think, Irish Members came here in an attempt to destroy Parliament. Fortunately for all of us, they failed. I will not go as far as to say that such an objective underlay the behaviour that we have seen, but Parliament serves no purpose whatever if none of us modifies our views or assumptions. Surely we come to the House to listen and to enlarge our experience and knowledge and, occasionally, to modify our assumptions and opinions. We cannot do that if we can never hear what anyone is saying.

I shall describe two phenomena which I am sure are familiar to all hon. Members. The House contains what I call the "What about" mob. That mob consists of hon. Members who say, "What about the IMF? What about inflation? What about unemployment, nurses and miners?" Such interventions are not worthy of a soap box debate in Hyde park and are singularly unworthy of the House. Surely we can bring to our debates qualities and standards better than, "What about?" Such behaviour denigrates and destroys what we are trying to do.

The other phenomenon is the finger-pointing mafia. Some hon. Members seem to think that their intellectual arguments are enhanced by stabbing their fingers at Front-Bench spokesmen. That is bad mannered and does not add to the point or force of the argument. The less we see of it the better and the more Parliament will be pleased. When television arrives in due course the public will not want to see such behaviour because they would not like it at all.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Gentlemen is complaining about mafia-like people pointing their fingers at the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. When I stand up with my hands in my pockets it is more than likely that one of the Tory yobbos from the goose-stepping tendency will tell me to take my hands out of my pockets. I am in a bit of a dilemma about what to do. If I were concerned about behaviour in this place, I would not be concerned about people making a point on behalf of their class. I would be concerned about those who come trotting in here half drunk or half sober, whatever the case may be, coming out of the 16 bars, or trotting off on business trips to South Africa, paid for by the Botha Government. I regard that as much more important than somebody who has his hands in his pockets or who is poking a finger at others when he speaks.

Sir Ian Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand my point. I sympathise with him if he is being shouted at by Members who tell him to take his hands out of his pockets, but I am not concerned about people who come here half sober or half drunk. I am much more concerned about people who come here half-witted.

The report on the calendar is interesting. It tells us that it is now over 10 years since the House had two weeks' recess at Easter or Whitsun, and the proposal that it makes for setting the calendar recommends that we should have a least one week at Easter and one week at Whitsun. I disagree with the Committee on that point. It is time that we became somewhat more generous to ourselves, particularly at Whitsun. I do not know what the opinion of the House is on that question, but I should happily trade 10 days in October for five additional days at Whitsun, and I sense that that finds some support in the House.

The real difficulty is this. We shall find more time—time lies at the heart of Parliament and much that we do here —if we spend a little more effort in trying to stop the waste of it. Parliamentary time, like energy, is something which is best found by conserving it. For example, I regard the second Division last night as a conspicuous example of the waste of 20 minutes of parliamentary time. It proved nothing to anyone and by the most simple procedural device, every point could have been satisfied. You, Mr. Speaker, could have asked the Liberals whether they would be willing to record their 20 votes against the majority. All that would have been needed would have been a yes, the Division would have been recorded and the great British public would have been none the wiser, or all the wiser. There would have been no fundamental difference to what we were doing.

Other points, which I wish to make as quickly as possible, also concern time. In the report on the use of time on the Floor of the House, the key conclusion is that in paragraph 2, which states:

> "Compared with legislative bodies in other large democracies, the House of Commons continues to sit on more days per annum than any others."

That prompts the immediate query: Are we, as a country, for that reason better governed than the other large democracies? Different sides of the House will have different opinions in answer to that question. The report concludes:

> "there needs to be the greatest possible efficiency in the use of the available time."

I wholeheartedly agree with that.

What are the facts? We waste time on a prodigious scale, and no more seriously than in four particular ways. The first, which has already been mentioned, is bogus points of order. We can do with far fewer of them and if, by other means, we can give hon. Members legitimate opportunities to raise legitimate points, we should do so and encourage them to do it in other ways.

Secondly, there is the tedious introduction of largely, or often, irrelevant parochial aspects and illustrations in hon. Members' speeches. We are all guilty of that. It seldom adds much to the debate or to the quality of the argument. We could all impose a greater self-discipline there.

Thirdly, there is the tedious repetition of arguments. Theoretically, this is against the rules of order, but it is seldom that anyone is pulled up for tedious repetition We are all guilty of it and we should all do it less frequently. We are all guilty of introducing, ad nauseam, fallacies and assumptions that cannot be sustained.

Fourthly, there is the question of voting. Here lies the greatest possible scope. We do not practise what I believe is widely practised now in all other managerial systems outside and possibly even inside politics. That is known as management by exception. The vote that matters is that which is decided by the electorate once every four to five years. That is the vote that makes the greatest impact on the nation and its affairs. Very occasionally, and particularly if the balance between the governing party and the Opposition is small, a vote is challenged or altered by a profound disagreement within the Government or the Opposition. Occasionally, there is such a thing as a procedural ambush. That is increasingly rare, especially when the Government have a substantial majority. It can be challenged by accidental absence, for example, by a significant number of Members being delayed on a plane from Scotland to London.

However, in my humble judgment, the nation is not interested in those changes, except when Governments are threatened or defeated; that is when the parliamentary balance no longer reflects the general election ballot. Those are the divisions in which the nation is really interested. If we alter our procedures in such a way as to give the nation what it wants, which is a full and proper report on those occasions, we can save ourselves an enormous amount of time on many of the other Divisions that take place here. By and large, the media are uninterested in whether our majority is 150, 100 or 50. The evidence of this is that those Divisions are seldom reported, apart from the particular examples that I have mentioned.

We have no management by exception when we should have such management. We assume a Government majority, but we could allow far more efficient procedures to reveal variations rather than reassert meaningless totals. There are many ways of achieving that and I shall simply mention two of them. First, there are the non-electronic methods. There is no need, for example, on a second Division late at night to troop through the Division Lobbies. I believe that your discretion, Mr. Speaker, and direction to record the vote of minor parties would have achieved every objective except that of wasting time.

Where there are several Divisions and we are bound to record identical votes, we can easily amalgamate them, without prejudice to anyone, least of all the Opposition. That applies to amendments, substantive motions and Third Readings where there may be three votes one after another. We all know that, plus or minus two or three votes, the identical Division will be recorded, and that we will have wasted 50 minutes of the House's precious time, which, as the Procedure Committee admits, we need for other purposes.

Finally, I must at least mention the fact that we largely ignore the significant potential of electronic devices. It now seems possible for any hon. Member to leave a completely secure coded vote in the system, which can be withdrawn

[Sir Ian Lloyd]

immediately on demand or cancelled by telephone. That technical possibility may seem far-fetched, but we should consider the contribution that it could make.

Late sittings have been much discussed. The House should consider the 10 o'clock rule in a fundamental way. The Procedure Committee suggested that hon. Members do not often refer to that or vote against it, but I regard that argument as specious. We do not vote against the suspension of the 10 o'clock rule for the simple reason that we know that the Government would win every Division on that type of vote. It is rather futile as the Government would always outvote us.

I very much agree with the Study of Parliament Group's trenchant comment that

> "proceedings in the chamber should comprise those on which Members are most anxious to exercise their rights to attend, speak and vote."

The group concludes that

> "the chamber could be spared even more secondary legislation, most debates on European Community Documents and, more significantly, the remaining stages of much legislation and more Second Readings. It could therefore become the rule that business such as secondary legislation and EC Documents would always be dealt with in Committee unless specifically brought to the Floor of the House by government, by opposition parties on an Opposition Day or by backbenchers on a Private Members' day."

I heartily commend that conclusion to the House.

9.35 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Regardless of the political colour of the Government, our democracy is in a crisis, both within this place and outside. That is seen to be so by many outside the House because of a number of actions that the Government are taking. The same applies to those who are within the House. Throughout our society we see the overwhelming and overbearing influence that is being brought to bear both inside and outside the House. The procedures of the House, which we are now debating, are being used in a way that reflects the contempt that Governments in general, but this one in particular, hold for what is nominally the legislature.

There has been no serious attempt to reform the way in which this place works. That is because basically it works to the advantage of this Government, perhaps more than it has worked to the advantage of any Government in the past. When television cameras come into the Chamber and viewers see the way in which the Government manipulate Parliament, there will be tremendous revulsion. The same can be said of any party which forms a Government, but the Conservative party and the present Government have demonstrated so clearly the problems that a Parliament without power faces when it is faced with an Executive that exercises no restraint.

There is a great deal more that the Opposition could do to highlight the problems and to produce a serious alternative to the way in which our democracy currently does not work. Unfortunately, there are two camps within the Opposition. There are those who say, "We'll give them some stick when we get in next time. We don't want any changes because we can be just as authoritarian. We can abuse our democracy in equal measure." I do not agree with that view. Secondly, there are those who feel that, if we were to make serious changes to our processes and procedures, their little niche, speciality or maverick ability in this, that or the other area would fall prey to a wider democracy. Both camps are wrong. I hope that tonight's debate will cause one or two of their members to think afresh about the wider values that we Socialists should promote.

We must examine the role of the House of Commons in a democracy. How do we expect the House to move forward so that it can play a serious role in our democracy? How can it extend its ability to hold Government to account? If there ever was a golden age, how can we re-invent the ability to scrutinise government? No outsider, no impartial judge, would say that we in this place effectively hold our Government to account. That can be said of Governments of whatever political colour.

Perhaps we need to go far further than the reforms proposed by the Procedure Committee in the many reports that are before us. We should move on to consider the separation of powers, a written constitution, a Bill of Rights and the wholesale reform of the judiciary before we can seriously tackle the inability of this place to hold the Government to account. That will have to wait for another debate and another day.

One of the several problems that has emerged during the debate is that a number of hon. Members have concentrated their sudden desire for procedural reform to make Parliament effective on one bad experience that they personally underwent during consideration of the Abortion (Amendment) Bill 1987. I do not believe that they do the cause of parliamentary reform any good whatsoever by suddenly discovering that there are problems with the private Member's Bill procedure and suddenly griping that there have been difficulties.

Mr. Beith: In my party, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), who intervened earlier, has argued for the past 10 or 15 years, long before his Bill came before the House, that there should be time for private Members' Bills to reach a conclusion.

Mr. Allen: I do not know about individual cases, but there certainly has not been a massive groundswell on those issues over many years. People have suddenly discovered it because of the issue that was raised last year.

Like every other debate on a Select Committee report —there have been only five on substantive motions since 1979, even though there have been almost 400 reports— after tonight's debate there will be no vote. This has merely been a talking shop exercise. If the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, will allow me, I suggest that it may be an error in the Procedure Committee reports that they contain no proposal that a specified number of Committee reports should, as of right, come back to the Floor of the House for a decision. Under such a system, a number of the hon. Gentleman's recommendations would have been voted upon. Until we link the system of Select Committees to the Floor of the House, those Committees will be divorced from real accountability and scrutiny by the Government.

Mr. Tony Banks: Why only a proportion? If the House sets up a Committee to consider something, surely that presupposes that the Committee should come back with proposals and the House should vote on them. Otherwise, what is the point of setting up the Committees in the first place?

Mr. Allen: My hon. Friend expresses his own view, and I do not wish to comment on his remarks.

Parliament is letting down democracy, as it is not fulfilling its role. Perhaps I come to this debate with some naivety as I am a new Member. However, I hope that that also means that I bring a fresher eye to this problem. I hope also that my commitment to this issue is in no doubt. It is something of a chore, I may tell the Leader of the House, to have to go to the Table Office every day to table my motions on the Order Paper, despite the welcome that I always get there. However, I have spent a year tabling my motions in an attempt, as Conservative Members said earlier, to bring this issue to the fore and get, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said, a number of hon. Members interested in this area. This is not an arcane and esoteric area. It is an area of parliamentary reform which is vital to the ability of our democracy to take decisions effectively, to inform people outside, and, above all, to hold the Government to account.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Perhaps it is rather surprising that the hon. Gentleman and I, as new Members with a fresh view, share the opinion of the Privy Councillors who have spoken this evening and believe that a change in the procedure is long overdue. Surely it must be right that the Government should find time to bring forward as soon as possible substantive proposals that we can vote on to change the procedure.

Mr. Allen: The Government will not find time to change the House, given that the House serves the Government's purpose. Until the House reasserts its independence from Government, I see no prospect of these matters being brought to a decision. None the less, they must be brought to the attention of hon. Members. I have continually tabled motions which appear as remaining orders of the day. Perhaps one day Mr. Speaker will surprise me by selecting one. I hope that that happens on a day when I am in attendance—as I usually am. Please do not surprise me, Mr. Speaker, by selecting one on an odd day when I am not here.

I have proposed that speeches in all debates should be limited to 10 minutes; that is self-explanatory. They should be timed by another clock in the Chamber that can be stopped so that interventions are not taken out of the 10 minutes. That would encourage debate as hon. Members would be very willing to give way and pursue points knowing that they would not lose any time out of their 10 minutes.

The point that all hon. Members should be treated equally in debate has been touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). I fully endorse his proposals about Privy Councillors. A list of speakers should be available before each debate so that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) would not have to come back half-expecting to be called to speak tonight. He would have been able to phone in and find out, and listen at leisure when he arrived.

Timetables should be introduced for all Bills. The theory of timetables is that the Government get their Bill at the end of the day, and they know the day on which that Bill will come out of Committee. But in Committee the timetabling of the Bill should be the possession of the Opposition, and they should choose the areas to be scrutinised in greatest depth.

A number of hon. Members have mentioned dates of sittings. Special Standing Committees are becoming increasingly important. Given the cursory examination that Bills receive, there should be a period of one month between First and Second Reading so that there can be examination outside of the clauses of the Bill.

Finally, Committees of the House should be allowed to come to the Floor of the House by right to present at least one report each year so that there is a connection between the Committee system and the Floor of the House. The Leader of the House kindly raised the question of hours, so I shall not spend any time on that. Tonight's debate has been helpful, but it would be far more helpful if the Leader of the House agreed that decisions as well as speeches should be forthcoming.

9.47 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I was hoping that at least one novelty would be proposed tonight. I would suggest the installation of polygraph lie detectors in both Dispatch Boxes. That would be to the advantage of the public and Back Benchers and to the disadvantage of Front Benchers on both sides. However, no such novelties have been proposed today.

If we consider what are normally regarded as the proper functions of a Parliament, we are not too bad at the redress of individual grievances; but everyone has to accept that we are not too smart at scrutinising the activities of the Executive, we are absolutely deplorable at controlling Government expenditure, and we have not been too good at producing understandable, workable laws.

During the past two or three years, it has not been the practitioners in the field who are unable to understand the law. In view of the successful court actions against the Government, particularly in local government finance and social security, it is clear that some of the Ministers who introduced the Bills did not understand them and broke the law fairly soon after they were enacted. In those circumstances, I do not think that we are doing too well in the production of understandable law.

One aspect of Parliament that tends to be ignored—the Select Committee, at least in some ways, tended to set it to one side—is our function as a place for free expression of opinion, where people are allowed to express their views and conduct campaigns within a political arena. I hope that no one will take offence when I say that I feel that the Select Committee has taken rather a managerial approach to this place, and in some sense there has been a lot of effort to depoliticise it, as if one of the Committee's objects was the smooth operation of the House. That is not always the case.

I do not want to talk about short speeches, other than to say that you, Mr. Speaker, should be empowered to impose a time limit from 6 pm to 9 pm, if you so wished, rather than from 6 pm to 8 pm or from 7 pm to 9 pm. That would definitely be an advantage.

The Select Committee made proposals for allocating time to Government Bills in Committee. In fact, not many Bills end up being guillotined—although, because of the sanguinary activities of the Leader of the House, during the last Session more Bills were guillotined than in any other Session in the history of Parliament. However, the number was still only six, so we are not reduced to guillotining Bills too frequently. Most Bills go through Committee as both sides expect; only the most

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

controversial of Bills do not. I am doubtful about the idea that a Committee should self-guillotine, fairly quietly and without much publicity. It is generally to the advantage of the Opposition to insist that if the Government want very controversial measures to go through quickly, at some point in the proceedings they must come to the Floor of the House and face adverse publicity.

Last Session we forced the Government to guillotine the Social Security Bill; the result was 140 column inches of newspaper coverage, mostly unfavourable to the Government. That was useful and worth while. It is a stick with which all Oppositions should be able to beat Governments, and to do so in public rather than reaching agreement upstairs.

The Select Committee recommended changes in the rules governing debates on statutory instruments. What strikes me as peculiar is that, four or five years after a Bill has been passed, no one has the faintest idea why it was thought to need the affirmative procedure. The belief is that the affirmative procedure applies to important matters and the negative procedure to less important matters. The fact is that what might appear to be important while a Bill is going through often turns out to be relatively trivial two or three years later.

The present rules for deciding whether statutory instruments should be dealt with on the Floor of the House or upstairs are probably better than the Select Committee's proposals. Much more important is the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) about the willingness of the House to allow important parts of legislation to be sloughed off into regulations when they should be on the face of the primary legislation. If we do not jib at putting such important matters into regulations rather than into primary legislation, the question whether they are dealt with on the Floor of the House or upstairs is trivial. I share the doubts of the Leader of the House about the wisdom of taking a substantial chunk of prime time at 3.30 pm for procedural wrangles about what should happen to particular statutory instruments. Neither side would benefit from such a use of parliamentary time.

A matter of much more consequence is whether it should be possible for the House to amend statutory instruments. Anyone can recognise the advantages of being able to do so. There might be a possibility—although I understand that it is not what the Select Committee is proposing—of identifying groups of extremely significant pieces of secondary legislation that could be amendable, but not to make secondary legislation in general amendable. That might go some way towards alleviating concern about the really poor level of draftsmanship to which the hon. Member for Honition (Sir P. Emery) referred.

Our present parliamentary calendar is ludicrous and has been determined by a hangover from when the House was run by country gentry. There are few of those left in the House, although there are a number of lawyers. We need an altogether different parliamentary calendar. If that necessitated the major constitutional change of shifting the party conferences to another time of year so that we could spread out our time more sensibly, perhaps we should consider doing that. Even within existing arrangements, it would be advantageous to most people to have some kind of parliamentary calendar, rather than conduct our affairs in our present haphazard way.

It is clear that, whatever we decide about the parliamentary calendar, in the end the Government will always be able to amend it if they are desperate. I cannot see many Opposition Members saying, "By God, we've triumphed this time. We've forced them to smash the parliamentary calendar to such an extent that we shall all meet on Christmas day." That will not normally be one of our objectives.

It appears to me that it would be easier for you, Mr. Speaker, and for practically every hon. Member, if we had a calendar set out in advance, and, by and large, the Government made us stick to it.

While we have our present approach to parliamentary government, the Government will always be able to fix what happens in the Chamber.—*[Interruption.]* I believe that the Whip has misunderstood the amount of time for which the Leader of the House has asked.

I believe that in general the propositions before us are rather managerial in their approach. In line with what my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) suggested, we need a more radical change to the way in which the House goes about its tasks, because we are still obsessed with 18th-century French ideas that in some way or another the House of Commons controls the Government.

The fact is that, once a Government have a majority, the Government control the House of Commons. As long as we fail to recognise that basic point, most of the propositions from the Procedure Committee will not have a substantial impact on what happens in the House or how we carry on our business. We need to start from an altogether different proposition. If we want the Procedure Committee to produce the radical changes in procedure which my party believes in, we must give it a more radical role altogether. We cannot criticise it for producing the propositions that are before us, because no one has asked it to be especially radical.

9.58 pm

Mr. Wakeham: With the permission of the House, I shall say a few words.

Because of the late start to the debate and the number of Members who wished to speak, I believed that it was better not to make a substantive reply on the issues, but to hear as many hon. Members as possible. I know that a number of hon. Members did not get into the debate. The debate was held on the Adjournment so that views could be expressed, and I cannot complain if I received some pretty strong views from a number of quarters, because that was the purpose of the exercise. It is clear that virtually any change to our procedures is considered controversial by one part of the House or another. I shall seek to find some general agreement and see whether we can make some progress.

Other matters have arisen in the debate that the Select Committee on Procedure might like to consider further and to give us some guidance on.

Sir Peter Emery: Will the shadow Leader of the House come and advise us?

Mr. Wakeham: I believe that the hon. Gentleman spoke with considerable authority and experience of opposition, which is an important part of the balance of this House.

I shall study tonight's speeches carefully. I also hope that the overwhelming majority of Members who did not take part in this debate will also study them, because what we do will also depend upon them.

It being Ten o'clock, the Motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Milk Quotas

10 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): I wonder, Mr. Speaker, whether we could take the two motions together?

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I regret having to make an objection to the two motions being taken together as I appreciate that the subject matters are linked not only in the form of the liquid, but because of the relationship between them. However, if we discuss the two motions together, the quality of scrutiny goes down, because we have only one and a half hours' debate on three different matters, including a possible amendment. Unless we finish the first motion within one and a half hours, we shall have double the time if we take them separately. Therefore, on the grounds of scrutiny, I object to the motions being taken together.

Mr. Speaker: We shall deal first with the motion on milk quotas.

Mr. MacGregor: I am perfectly content to take the two motions separately.

I beg to move,

> That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8108/88 on milk and milk products and of the Government's intention to pursue agreement which meets the requirements of the European Court's judgment while containing costs and ensuring that the effectiveness of milk quotas is maintained.

It is important to give the House a brief reminder of the background of this matter. In 1984, when milk quotas were first introduced, it was clear that something had to be done to deal with sharply-rising surpluses and ever-escalating spending on support for the dairy sector. The existing regime was simply not working, so the Community had to act. Quotas were not the Government's original preferred approach, but it became clear during the negotiations in autumn 1983—I was Minister of State at that time and involved in the negotiations—that quotas were the only negotiable solution for the Council of Ten Ministers, as it then was.

There are considerable disadvantages to milk quotas, and I have never hidden that fact. They involve a large and costly administrative burden for the Government and industry. Perhaps one of their biggest disadvantages is that they inhibit new entrants to the industry and inhibit entrepreneurial farmers within it. On the other hand, quotas have enabled the industry to contain its dairy problem. I say "contain" because expenditure is still high, and the dairy regime is still the most expensive in the Community.

It is true that the surpluses are largely being dealt with —the "vanishing mountains", as I have described them —and it is important for the public and hon. Members to realise that today those mountains are vanishing.

In the past year we have seen an 80 per cent. decline in the butter mountain in the United Kingdom and the skimmed milk powder mountain has vanished. The disposal of production, however, is still heavily subsidised. About three quarters of the Community's skimmed milk powder production and one fifth of butter production receives a subsidy to assist in finding an outlet for that production. We are now trying to deal with that problem

[Mr. MacGregor]

and are urging that some of the subsidies should be reduced. The Commission, with my encouragement, has now taken action on that matter.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that the Court of Auditors recently pronounced on the incredible waste connected with the public storage of goods that form part of the common agricultural policy. That storage costs us about £3 billion-plus a year, and the Court of Auditors described the whole system as a total shambles and utterly discredited. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must do something to get this matter under control, because it represents one of the greatest wastes of public expenditure that the country witnesses?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend goes a little far, and perhaps I can explain why. We are not talking about £3 billion being wasted through bad storage methods. A large part of that cost has been incurred in the straight storage and disposal of the surpluses. I made it clear that, as a result of the CAP reforms, those surpluses are significantly falling, so, over a period, that cost will reduce.

Where the Court of Auditors has been right in drawing our attention to difficulties is in respect of the way in which some of the storage and dispoal systems have been operating. The cost of these difficulties is a much lesser figure. The real need is to get rid of the surpluses, for that is the way that costs will come down. Nevertheless, while we have surpluses, I am in favour of ensuring that we operate them as efficiently as possible and that there is no waste or mismanagement. That makes for inefficient use of resources for which the taxpayer has to pay. I assure my hon. Friend that I drew attention to the Court of Auditors' report at the last Council meeting, saying that we should all be concerned to learn its lessons. I am glad to say that I was supported by the Commission, and that the Council will be considering the report shortly. But the distinction to make is an important one.

I referred to some of the quota system's helpful elements, including containing expenditure. Above all, on that side of the equation, quotas have given our dairy farmers stability. Producer numbers have fallen since quotas were imposed, but that is the continuation of a long-term trend. Fundamentally, dairy farmers know the broad constraints within which they will be working until 1992. The price they receive for their output is about 3 per cent. higher than it was a year ago. Dairy farming profits, which were falling when quotas were introduced, have risen steadily since then.

With the rationalisation of processing capacity that has occurred, the industry is in good shape to maximise the value of its production, and—with curbs on production—that will be the key to its future prosperity.

One of the other, often very difficult, problems about quotas is the acute difficulties that arise—especially in the initial stages but also subsequently from time to time—in the methods of and principles applied to the distribution of quotas. That was one of the most difficult tasks facing us on the introduction of quotas—deciding how to distribute them. It is one of the issues before us tonight. In April, the European Court ruled that the original Community quota regulations were in breach of Community law by failing to make provision for producers who intended returning to production after fulfilling the four or five-year cessation period required by the scheme. That judgment requires the Commission to make proposals for changes to the quota regulations.

At this point, I stress that neither the Council of Ministers nor the Commission in any way welcomes that development. It presented a problem that we did not seek and the need for policy changes that we did not wish to make. However, the Council is obliged to act in response to a European Court judgment. It has no option.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): There is an option. If the Council of Ministers agrees that this is thoroughly disadvantageous, an amendment to the treaty would overturn the Court's ruling.

Mr. MacGregor: That is probably beyond the abilities of the Council of Agriculture Ministers to bring about. We feel that we must act within the Court's judgment, but I shall explain how we are trying to minimise the disadvantages. In view of the shortness of this debate, and despite the fact that it is a single debate, perhaps I ought to get on with my speech, so that other right hon. and hon. Members may have an opportunity to contribute.

I have sympathy with those farmers who have complained about the measures that the Council is now considering on the ground that they are unfair to existing producers—for example, those with development awards, and particularly those who found their original quota requests sharply cut back in 1984. I have to say that this is not a step taken by Ministers on their initiative. We are being purely reactive, as we are obliged to be, and it has been my objective—and here I come to my hon. Friend's point—to minimise possible unfairnesses.

The Commission's response to the Court's decision is the package of proposals as refined for decision by the Council and set out in document COM(88)446. Briefly, a new category of producer eligible for the allocation of quota is defined on the basis of restrictive criteria. These are designed to ensure that the only producers who benefit will be those who are committed to return to milk production, although they joined the cessation scheme at the time.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): How is the Court's decision being interpreted? Does it apply to farmers who ceased milk production if the five-year period was before 1984, or specifically to those cases in which the five-year period ended after that year? Would such farmers be prevented from applying for quotas? Many of them would like that to be clarified.

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot give a clear answer to that question yet, because it is one of the matters currently being debated in the Council.

An increase in the Community quota reserve of 500,000 tonnes is proposed to alleviate the problems faced by member states in allocating quotas to the new category of producers. To compensate in part for the extra costs flowing from the additional production, the Commission proposes to reduce the butter intervention price by 2 per cent., which would be offset by a reduction in the co-responsibility levy for small producers. Finally, the package incorporates a technical change in the way in which supplementary levy is calculated to clarify member states' liability in the first two years of quotas. Those are the key ingredients. There are a number of other detailed points which there is not time to go into this evening.

From the outset of our Council discussions, I emphasised my belief that we should be guided by certain principles. First, we should aim to ensure that the quotas of existing producers were not affected by the need to respond to the Court's decision. Secondly, the conditions for eligibility should be restrictively drawn to ensure that only those genuinely intending to go back into milk—and then doing so—should benefit. Thirdly, the quota should not be capable of being sold or leased.

I know that those points have been strongly supported by many of our farmers, and I am pleased to see that there has been growing support for them in the Council. The measures before us reflect them, while taking fair account of the interests of those producers who clearly did and do intend to return to milk production. Moreover—this is another important criterion—the package now taking shape will not undermine the effectiveness of the quota system.

The package has already been subject to considerable discussion in the Council, and I cannot be certain when we shall reach final decisions, although I hope—it is only a hope, but I intend to try to achieve it—that it will be at the December Council. I am keen to resolve the issue—which is causing uncertainty among our dairy farmers—as quickly as possible. Overall, however, while a number of points of detail remain to be resolved, the question of eligibility conditions seems to be moving to a satisfactory resolution.

The remainder of the package has received rather less attention in Community discussion, but raises some important issues. In view of the continuing level of surplus production, I regret the need to increase the total amount of quota available, but—as I have said—it was not of our choosing. It will not be easy to avoid, given the need to make provisions for a new category of producers without affecting the outlook for those who already hold quotas. The need to limit the potential demand for new quota is the main reason for keeping the eligibility criteria very restrictive.

I support the proposed cut in the butter price, although I regret that even on the Commission's figures it does not compensate for the whole cost of the extra quota proposed. Given the current cost of the dairy regime—which, as I explained, is still the most expensive in the Community—it would have been unfair to seek compensatory savings from other sectors for a problem that has arisen in the dairy sector itself.

By the same token, I am unhappy at the suggested cut in the co-responsibility levy for very small producers. It has little economic justification; it is not relevant to the Court's judgment that we have to implement; and it disadvantages the United Kingdom because so few of our producers fall into that category. I have therefore been opposing it.

Overall, this is a complex proposal which has been forced on the Community by an unexpected decision of the Court. However, in the light of discussions so far, there are better prospects than I feared at the outset of a package emerging that is reasonable in all the circumstances. There is still, therefore, enough time for us to ask for views and to reach a final decision. That is why I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate. I have made a short speech to enable as many hon. Members as possible to express their views on the proposal. It will enable me to take their views into account when I prepare my approach to the further and, I hope, final Council discussions.

10.15 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I, too, intend to restrict my remarks to the aftermath of the Mülder case so that as many right hon. and hon. Members as possible can take part in the debate.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this important matter. It enables hon. Members to put their views to the Minister, which he will be able to take with him to the meeting that is to be held between 12 and 16 December. He can then fight for what we believe in. Many hon. Members believe that the Court's judgment is perverse, but that is the legally correct position and we have to abide by it. Nevertheless, the judgment highlights the injustices that many small dairy farmers face. They have done badly out of the introduction of quotas. They have not had the advantage of the golden handshake schemes from which farmers who are covered by the Mülder judgment can benefit. That fact needs to be put on the record. Many small farmers were able to make a living before the introduction of quotas. The cuts, however, have made it difficult for them to continue in business as dairy farmers.

The Minister implied that the Mülder case presents the Commission with a serious problem. A literal and generous interpretation of the Court's judgment could mean that an additional 5 million tonnes of milk would have to be found. To put that into perspective, I understand that that is roughly equal to the total quantity of milk that has been saved since the introduction of generous quota systems in 1984. Faced with that dilemma, the Commission felt that it had been placed in an impossible position. It has therefore proposed a limited scheme.

It would be useful if the Minister could tell hon. Members about the bargaining positions of the other member states. It would also be useful if he could further clarify the British Government's stance. We understand that the new scheme will be available only to those farmers who received the non-marketing premiums after 1 April 1984. That is restrictive, but I do not grumble about it. We understand also that the new scheme will apply only to farmers who are able to show that they can run viable dairy units. It will not apply to farmers who are already in receipt of the dairy quota.

The most interesting aspect of the Commission's proposals—I stress that they are proposals—is that the Minister was frank and open at the November Council meetings when these matters were discussed. His stance was known when the Council was discussing the small group of people who are eligible. The Minister supported the Commission's proposals. May we be told about the attitude of the Germans, the main beneficiaries of the scheme, and that of the Danes and the southern Europeans to the scheme, who will not benefit from it?

Another interesting point in the document is that if any of the new quota is subsequently leased or sold it will be confiscated and returned to the Community's reserve. When, a few minutes ago, the Minister elaborated on that, the House applauded what he said. Is it likely that if quotas are leased or sold they will be confiscated and returned to the Community reserve, or will we find that

[Dr. David Clark]

that clause is not implemented? We think that the extra quota should not have a cash value on it. I hope that the Minister can give us a firm assurance about that.

The Minister has previously cautioned farmers about the inherent value of quotas and warned that, while they have a value now, there is no guarantee that quotas will go on indefinitely. It is right to repeat that, because we are all aware of the considerable amount of money that is spent on the leasing and purchasing of quotas.

Will the Minister take on board the worry that there could be transnational quota purchases after 1992? There are considerable differences between the market prices of quotas in the Republic of Ireland, Britain and Holland. At the moment it is not possible to trade quota across national boundaries, but such trade will presumably be allowed after 1992. That being so, the concept of a national quota, which we found acceptable, could be destroyed. Taking the argument to its logical conclusion, we could find that there are no cows in Britain, and that all milk is produced in Holland.

We basically support the Government's line, and we think that they and the Commission are right to try to restrict the availability of quota. We find the judgment rather unfair, bearing in mind the fact that many small farmers have done rather badly out of the milk quota system.

10.22 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): My right hon. Friend the Minister referred to the early negotiations in 1983 and 1984, when milk quotas were introduced. I think that I would not be exaggerating if I said that he and I have those negotiations written across our souls in indelible ink. We will never forget those difficult months.

My right hon. Friend referred to some of the inherent weaknesses of milk quotas. One of our anxieties was that quotas should be properly enforced in all countries. Now I read that in Italy, for example, there is a suggestion that massive amounts of levy have not been paid. I hope that my right hon. Friend will tell us that, if that is the case, no effort will be spared in extracting that money from Italy. I remind him of a provision which he and I got put in late in those negotiations—that in the event of a country not paying up, the levy would come from the farmers and not from the Government. That is important, and I hope that he will not forget it when dealing with Italy.

I agree strongly with most of what the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) said, but he was a bit unfair not to acknowledge that, when quotas were introduced, we leaned over backwards to ensure that small farmers got back to their pre-quota milk production as quickly as possible. I think that we succeeded. That should be acknowledged.

We must accept the judgment of the European Court —the hon. Member for South Shields responsibly and honestly said that—but I think that it was grotesque in every way. It is well known that most of the people who took the 1977 scheme to be paid to get out of milk production did so as a permanent and not as a temporary step. Few of them could go back into milk production even if they wanted to. No doubt some of them will do, hoping to be able to make a quick buck out of the value of the milk quota, but I shall say more on that later.

I am sure that the Minister remembers, as I do, the difficult months after the introduction of the milk quota. What caused as much resentment as anything else was the fact that some people who had taken the scheme to go out of milk production then came back into it and were given generous quotas. That was widely regarded as unfair at the time, and it will be regarded as even more unfair now if some of those people return after years out of milk production. The European Court has gone off its head in making that judgment.

I welcome the Minister's comments. I want to underline them and suggest that they should be sticking points in the negotiations. This quota is unexpected, so it should be non-transferable; people should not be able to profit by selling it. The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) spoke about that crucial matter.

How will my right hon. Friend deal with a case in which somebody who has been given extra quota then wants to sell his farm? Will he be allowed to sell the quota with the farm, or does it die when he leaves the farm? That is an important matter. It must be a sticking point that people who are given this windfall should not be able to cash it.

I welcome enormously the Minister's statement that the United Kingdom Government are seeking to protect existing quota holders and not to take some of the extra windfall quota from people who, goodness knows, have had enough difficulties in the past few years with milk quotas. The Minister will be taking part in difficult negotiations: I understand that almost as well as any other hon. Member.

I grieve that the Germans' lack of realism seems to continue unabated despite the death of Mr. Strauss in Bavaria. I hope that a little more realism will creep into the way in which Mr. Kiechle works his case in the Council of Agriculture Ministers, because it has been less than responsible for many years. I understand that the Germans want producers, under the windfall arrangement, to receive all the quota that they would have been granted had they been producing in the base year, and that they also want part-time farmers to benefit. I hope that my right hon. Friend will resist that proposal, because I see no purpose in supporting the Germans' suggestion.

I endorse heavily what my right hon. Friend said about his strong opposition to reducing the co-responsibility levy for small producers as part of the whole package. My right hon. Friend knows that one of his most important battles on behalf of British farmers in Brussels and Luxembourg will be to resist the continuous attempts by the Commission and other countries to slant the common agricultural policy in favour of small farmers. That is an attack on British agriculture because we have a hugely better and more efficient structure than almost any other country in the Community.

The proposal to reduce the co-responsibility levy for small producers is just another way in which small farmers —the majority of farmers—in almost all other Community countries benefit at the expense of British agriculture. One should remember that the average size of herd in this country is about 60 cows, whereas in a country such as Portugal, I believe, about 97 per cent. of the milk is produced from herds of three or fewer cows. That fact illustrates the differences in structure. We must not allow the Community to take us in Britain to the cleaners.

I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend's approach to this most difficult and unforeseen problem, and I wish him luck in the negotiations.

10.30 pm

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I am sure that hon. Members of all parties will agree that since the overnight introduction four years ago of milk quotas, agriculture in Britain has never recovered confidence. It will take a long time to restore that confidence. I say that with respect to the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and his hon. Friends because I am not in any way condemning him, but simply referring to the milk quotas that were forced on us by the EEC Commission.

It is a great pity that during those four years the industry has lost further confidence in nearly every sector. I have agreed with many of the suggestions made by the Minister in the past four years about what should be done to try to help agriculture, but I hope he will recognise that it is the wish of the majority of farmers in this country that he should stop dismantling many of our agricultural institutions, and that he should not take away the guaranteed price system that has operated so successfully for some of our products. I shall not refer to any of them tonight, but I should like the Minister to be aware of the views of many farmers. After reading what Mr. Derek Andrews, the permanent secretary to the Ministry of

[Mr. Geraint Howells]

Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, has said, the fortunes of the farming community do not look very bright. It seems that agriculture will have a bad time in the next 12 months.

I turn now to milk quotas and the EEC ruling. I am sure that many dairy farmers throughout the country were as shocked as I was on hearing the EEC's ruling about the two Dutch farmers. However, that has happened and we must live with it. I agree entirely with the sentiments expressed by the Minister tonight. My hon. Friends support him wholeheartedly and hope that he will be successful in his deliberations in Brussels in the coming months.

I am sure that to their way of thinking the Dutch farmers will feel that they have been fortunate. I wonder whether there are any dairy farmers in Britain who would go to court about an extra milk quota. Could any farmers in Britain do the same as those two Dutch farmers? It would be sad if many dairy farmers in this country would do so.

Although this matter has been covered by many hon. Members, I should like to ask some questions. I hold the same view as the Milk Marketing Board, which is in favour of making sure that milk production surrendered will not be surrendered to the non-marketing schemes.

The dairy industry in this country would like answers to three questions. First, many farmers have asked me—I pass this on to the Minister and hope that he can give me an assurance on it—whether the milk quotas will be operating in this country after 1992. Although the right hon. Gentleman said that the butter surplus in the EEC was diminishing, does he foresee a day in the near future when there will be a milk shortage in the EEC?

We have heard about quotas being bought and sold and the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) talked about the transnational quota system that will operate after 1992. A few years ago many dairy farmers in Wales sold their quotas to farmers in England, but I was delighted to learn that the trade is now in reverse. Many farmers are worried about the value of the quotas. I agree entirely with the Minister, who has been saying for the last few years that we have to be careful that farmers' milk quotas do not become worthless after 1992.

The final and best question is the one put to me by dairy farmers. Can the Minister give an assurance that British dairy farmers will have the opportunity to compete on equal terms with their counterparts in the rest of the EEC? If he can give that assurance, many dairy farmers will look ahead with confidence. The ruling has my backing and that of my hon. Friends.

10.35 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): There is no doubt that the introduction of milk quotas has substantially reduced the output of milk from our dairy farms. The turn round in farmer opinion after the quotas were introduced has been astonishing. There was an enormous amount of ill-feeling flying around when my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and our mutual right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food were doing their best to introduce the milk quotas. I was the Parliamentary Private Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and I remember going to the three counties show and then on to Ross-on-Wye and Dyfed. We were mobbed by farmers. I always thought that farmers were friendly until we went to those places.

It is to the great credit of my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale that he stuck to his guns and carried on with a difficult job. Dairy farmers now owe him a debt of gratitude that they can never express. That was a difficult time for my right hon. Friend, but the one thing that dairy farmers do not now want to part with is their dairy quota.

It is good news that stocks are falling, because that means lower costs to the taxpayers, less flak for the farmers and less criticism that the dairy industry is not trying to solve its own problems.

Like other hon. Members, I should like to turn to the Mülder factor, the Dutch farmer who took financial inducements to stop milk production through a beef conversion scheme before quotas were introduced in 1984. Admittedly, it was a temporary arrangement, but how was anybody to know that the Dutch farmer was later to return to dairy farming? Mr. Mülder, who pocketed the cash that was available, has now changed his mind and decided to return to dairy farming. May I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister whether it is possible to appeal against this European Court of Justice ruling? *[Interruption.]* I notice that the Minister moves his head to show that it is not. At any rate, he has not fallen asleep.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) suggested that Commissioners might rewrite the rules. That is not an unrealistic suggestion. Perhaps we could have an explanation about that. It seems to be the height of injustice that farmers, who were involved in expansion plans when the quotas were introduced, were not offered the facility that is now being offered to Mr. Mülder. Many of my constituents who were engaged on Government expansion plans were knee-capped when the quotas were introduced. Many of them, although they were not made bankrupt, had to sell their farms and go into a different business. Why should they not be allowed such an opportunity? Perhaps we could go to the European Court about that as well. There is a great feeling of injustice because the Mülders have received what the farmers in the Forest of Dean see as rather special treatment.

It is incredible that the EEC will find another 500,000 tonnes of production to help Mr. Mülder, and anybody else in his position. It will be a great incentive to other farmers to find ways to ride in on the back of this court case to see whether they, too, can get some extra production or come back into dairy farming. It cannot be right that, having cashed in once to get out of milk, he should seek to cash in again to get back into milk. I was delighted to hear my right hon. Friend say that he will use his best influence to make sure that this is not resaleable, not leaseable and not inheritable.

A quota is now worth money, and the Mülder case is seen by dairy farmers throughout the country as the height of injustice. All the good will of the farmers of the Forest of Dean and of dairy farmers throughout the country goes with my right hon. Friend in his negotiations to ensure that the quota is not resaleable and cannot be passed on. I wonder whether any more skeletons will fall from any more cupboards. Perhaps we should do our best to bring them all out, once and for all, and put an end to it, so that the farmers can know not only where they are now, but where they will be in the future. I wish my right hon. Friend the best of luck in these negotiations, for many of us admire his lucidity, tenacity and stamina in hanging on in all these negotiations. He is positively terrier-like in the way that he approaches the European negotiations.

10.42 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): First, I apologise for the fact that I may not be here for the winding-up speech.

I shall take a slightly different tack from that taken by the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland). Milk quotas have not just created benefits. In my constituency, a brand-new factory that cost £2 million and employed 60 people had to close. It is a shame that we cannot debate New Zealand butter with the milk quotas, because they tie in. I accept the good reasons of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North (Mr. Spearing) for objecting to that, but the only logic that would cause me to change my mind and be in favour of the importation of New Zealand butter is the fact that there is now a shortage of milk for manufacturing processes. It makes no sense to stop imports of New Zealand butter in those circumstances.

I am a Member sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union, and many of its members have jobs in the milk processing industry. The quota system may have got rid of surpluses, which is a good thing, but we do not have a free market. It is surprising that Tory Members do not want it. We have a monopoly shortage. The Minister said that the butter mountain has started to melt. Not thousands of tonnes, nor hundreds of tonnes, nor even a single pat of butter goes in intervention. We have a shortage of milk. Companies with orders for evaporated milk, full-cream milk powder, yogurt and cheese—all labour-intensive processes—cannot fulfil those orders because, although we have the manufacturing capacity, we do not have the raw materials. These are all genuine orders; there is no subsidy.

The Minister said that quotas brought a secure future for the milk-processing industry, but that is not correct because there is a lack of investment in the industry. There is surplus capacity, but not the promise of extra milk to meet those orders. I accept that there is a surplus in Europe. I asked the Minister about that before the recess and he admitted that that was so, but, when I asked whether there was a surplus in the United Kingdom, he did not answer the question. Italy and France are putting cheese into intervention, but, in Scotland, the creameries cannot meet export orders for cheddar cheese, which would greatly help our balance of payments, because of the milk quota system. In a perverse way, therefore, the ruling of the European Court will perpetuate that situation.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Was not the quota system designed to ensure that the United Kingdom opened up its market to liquid milk from Europe? As the hon. Gentleman said, there is a shortage of milk in this country. Manufacturing capacity is unused because of that shortage and the system is now achieving what Europe rather than the United Kingdom wanted—access to the English market for continental liquid milk.

Mr. Martlew: If the hon. Gentleman is asking whether we got a raw deal from the Commission's milk quota proposals, the answer is yes, just as we normally do. However, the dairy farmers who are left did not get a raw deal; they are doing very well. If we consider agriculture in general, dairy farming is the one area that is doing well. One of the reasons for that is that the Milk Marketing Board, which is, in effect, a farmers' monopoly co-operative, pushes up the price of milk for manufacturers. That money then goes to the farmers. As a consequence, we shall be pushed out of the world market and some creameries will close. Those farmers now have guaranteed security. They have a product that is more valuable than milk and, in some cases, more valuable than the land that they farm.

Let me quote an example from an advertisement in Saturday's *Yorkshire Post*. The advertisement, which appears under an advertisement for cess pools—that is perhaps significant—states:

"Milk quota for sale. Both clean and part used with B.F. 3·56 to 4·05 per cent."

The figures refer to the butter fat content.

We cannot blame the farmer for selling the quota. He did not buy it; he just happened to be there when the EEC and the Government gave him the commodity. Surely that cannot be right.

We must consider a system in which we can equalise the amount of milk that goes into manufacture in Europe. One of the reasons why there is a shortage of milk at present is the milk curve. It would be a bureaucratic nightmare, but we must examine the possibility of a monthly quota so that we can calculate the times of year when we require the milk. That cannot be done by giving financial incentives to the farmers. We must consider a system whereby, in the spring, there would be no surpluses to go into intervention, but, when in periods of shortage, we would have the milk to ensure that our creameries kept going.

I hope that the Minister will examine that option and consider ways of getting rid of that distasteful speculation and bartering of milk quotas represented by a certificate that the farmers never earned and do not deserve. The only person who pays is the consumer.

10.50 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I have two brief questions for the Minister, who is clearly dealing with great skill with an issue that has arisen from a judicial decision. First, what is the net cost of that which has been proposed? The papers that are before us are mystifying. The Commission refers to a "net deficit" of about £18 million. The Ministry tells us that the cost will be about £30 million. The third estimate comes from my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, who, being a sensible and humble man, has taken a middle view and opted for £24 million. Why is there such a great difference between the estimates, and where will the money come from?

In a recent debate we were told that there are legally binding terms and restraints on agricultural spending. I ask the Minister to tell us where the £30 million, or £24 million, will come from. Will it mean some compensating factor for other spending on agriculture?

Further to the net addition to Community spending on agriculture, will there be any additional spending by member states, including the United Kingdom? The Court of Auditors' report says that the transfer of financial responsibility for butter dumping to member states was unlawful, and the Council of Ministers declined even to discuss the proposal. We know, however, that butter dumping is extremely expensive. It was revealed in a

[Mr. Teddy Taylor]

parliamentary answer last week that the most recent price of selling butter is 2·75p per pound, which seems extremely low. When the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells), the Liberal party's spokesman, was speaking of the possibility of a shortage of milk and butter because of the reduced quotas, he should have been aware also of the implications of the fire clearance sale.

Will there be additional spending by member states because of any increase in the dumping of butter, which has reached extraordinary and substantial levels? My right hon. Friend the Minister will know that specific assurances were given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and by all the members of the European Council in February, when they agreed to a massive increase in Community spending. I hope that we shall be told who will pay for the deficit. Secondly, will there be a compensating effect on the Community's spending on agriculture? Thirdly, why are the Commission's figures so wildly different from the Government's estimates?

10.53 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I, too, have experienced the milk quota issue at first hand. The quota was announced on the day that I was selected as the Conservative party candidate for the Stafford by-election. That is another event that I am unlikely to forget.

I endorse the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) as a member of the Select Committee on European Legislation, which recommended that the issue before us should be debated at an early date. There is the important matter of principle that these matters are ultimately subject to majority voting, and there is potential for a blocking minority that will be constituted by the Mediterranean countries. We do not know what the outcome will be, and at the same time it is clear that the proposals that we are discussing are inspired largely by the interests of the German Minister and the electorate which he serves.

I have the greatest possible respect for my right hon. Friend the Minister, for he is a man of great skill and determination, but how are we to retrieve a situation that will have a significant adverse effect on the British farmer, on the assumption that majority voting will have the result that we expect? We must stand up for our rights.

There was a unique event on Monday, when the proposal to take note of a European document was opposed by the Government. If we are out-voted on this issue, we should not take that lying down in the Council of Ministers or as a Parliament. We should ensure, as a Government and as a Parliament, that we make our protest and that we act accordingly, if necessary by a vote in the House.

10.54 pm

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): I support my right hon. Friend the Minister in this matter. I believe that he is working very hard for constituents like mine who over the past few years have had a 19 per cent. cut in their milk quota and who now have some stability. They welcome the fact that the Minister is determined to fight to preserve that position and to ensure that farming is on a fair financial footing over the next few years.

In Pembrokeshire we have watched with some concern the implications of the Mülder case, especially for family farms which tend to be small and medium-sized units. I hope that the Minister will bear in mind the parliamentary answer that he gave me recently. In one he said that it was not envisaged that there would be any further cuts in quota after this year, taking account of those that have already been announced. In another he said that surpluses had, to a large extent, been eliminated in the dairy sector. Given that that is the case, we must ensure that there are no cuts in quota as a result of the Mülder judgment.

Farmers who now believe that they have a stable position should not find suddenly that further unexpected cuts are made in 1989 and 1990. It is up to the Commission to find some other way if it is necessary to recompense farmers who went out of production in 1978 rather than take it out on the farmers who are still in production and who have been led to believe that the position has been fixed for the foreseeable future.

I welcome a letter sent by Mr. O. J. Williams, the prospective Conservative candidate for the European Parliament constituency of Mid and West Wales, to the Minister in September in which he stated that in 1984 only 65 per cent. of hardship cases were met. Not every farmer who suffered hardship received benefit. It is important that we should remember that when we are dealing with the Mülder case. We should therefore take a fair, but restrictive, attitude towards the applications from farmers who went out of production as long ago as 1978.

10.56 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I commend the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett). That is not something that I normally do, but at least he was the only individual on the Government Back Benches to commit himself and his support to this evening's proposal. I congratulate him on that.

I was surprised by the attitude adopted by the Minister when he opened the debate. I was also surprised by the comments of the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) who followed him this evening, but who preceded him in office. They both spent some considerable time hand-wringing and bemoaning the evils of the quota system and the common agricultural policy. I have to remind them that it was the Conservative Government who took us into the European Community, who accepted the common agricultural policy and who for the past nine years have been the stewards of British interests in the European Community. If there are any deficiencies in the quality of the agreements——

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish this sentence and make this point, I will give way, as I think that he has a valid intervention to make. However, at least he should have the courtesy to allow me to finish the point that I am making.

If there are any defects in the agreements coming from Europe at the moment, we know who is responsible for them. The British Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food represents British interests in Brussels.

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman go on the record and agree that, as a result of the referendum, the Labour Government ensured that we stayed in Europe and, furthermore, renegotiated on terms that have turned out to be less than satisfactory?

Mr. Davies: That is irrelevent to this evening's debate. My point is that for the past nine years all the agreements made in Brussels have been made with the agreement of successive British Ministers. There are two of them here tonight who have bemoaned and criticised the quota system—the present Minister attempted to suggest that there would be some benefit from quotas—but they have been responsible for the implementation of the quota system in Britain. We should not forget that.

We have had a very wide-ranging debate, and I was surprised at just how wide-ranging it was. Indeed, the contribution from the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) was quite entertaining, as is normally the case. I hope that we did not keep him from his dinner for too long.

The Mülder case and the judgment that resulted from it receives our support for two very good reasons. First, the outgoers scheme, as it was introduced in 1978, was known to be a temporary scheme. The Minister was suggesting to the Under-Secretary that a Labour Government were in office at the time. That is true. I hope that I am showing the degree of consistency that my party has always shown on these matters in endorsing the action taken by that Government in 1978. It was a temporary scheme, and it would be quite wrong for individuals who voluntarily involved themselves in those outgoers schemes now to be penalised. Therefore, we support the principle that was developed in the Mülder case. Secondly, the principle of the violation of legitimate expectations was the basis on which the judgment was made.

We supported the Minister's initiatives on set-aside. It is important that the principles developed in this case are seen to be supported by all parties in the House. Otherwise, initiatives such as the one that he is now taking under set-aside could be in jeopardy if farmers felt that their legitimate interests would be prejudiced in two, three, four or five years' time—God forbid that quotas on cereals would be introduced—and they would be reluctant to enter into set-aside agreements. For those reasons, we support the principles of the judgment in the Mülder case.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a fundamental difference between a temporary scheme, whereby the scheme itself is not supposed to last for ever, and the temporary exodus of individual farmers? In the case that we are discussing tonight, the farmers themselves decided to go out of milk production. There is a great difference between whether the scheme was temporary and whether the farmers' cessation of milk production was temporary.

Mr. Davies: I understand the distinction that the hon. Gentleman is trying to make, but, as I understand it, the temporary scheme was clearly intended to take farmers out of milk production for a limited period. That was the nature of the scheme and the basis on which entrants into the scheme signed various agreements.

I support the principles involved, but I have some doubts about the implementation of the scheme. I understand that in September, when the Commission was considering the matter, it estimated that 1 million tonnes of quota would be required to meet applications under the scheme. The scheme now before us provides for only half that figure: only 500,000 tonnes of additional quota will be made available. Will the Minister square that circle and tell us how he proposes to deal with it? If there are more applicants than quota, will he come back and suggest that more quota be found? Will he enforce some percentage agreement, take applications on the basis of first come, first served, or will he reduce the amounts available? Those are serious questions and I hope the Minister will tell us how he proposes to deal with them when he replies to the debate. They are particularly important for Britain because the British dairy industry was as prepared as that of any other country in Europe voluntarily to involve itself in the 1978 scheme.

I draw the attention of the House to the appendix that accompanies the motion. It refers to the number of applicants for cessation in the various countries of the European Community. In the United Kingdom there were 5,694 beneficiaries of the milk non-marketing premium and 2,510 beneficiaries in the dairy herd conversion scheme. In total, more than 8,000 British farmers participated in the schemes. The Under-Secretary agrees. I am grateful for that because I have here a comment which he made in the explanatory memorandum on the European Community legislation. He said:

> "The United Kingdom accounted for a high percentage of the production surrendered under Regulation 1078/77 and will wish to see this reflected in the allocation of any additional quota."

British farmers provided 10 per cent. of production relinquished under those schemes, with 8,000 of them participating. A court judgment now makes quotas available to two Dutch individuals who took court action. When the Minister replies, I want him to say how the proposals will affect the 8,000 British farmers who took advantage of the 1978 scheme. He should have the answer readily available.

I refer the Minister to the detailed translation available in the Vote Office, which sets out the criteria for eligibility for entry into the scheme. One has been included quite deliberately to exclude not only British farmers but a large number of European farmers. It states that they had to have

> "applied in vain to the Member State's competent authority for a reference quantity between 31.3.1984 and 31.7.1988."

The Ministry has records of all the applications lodged with it for quota between 31 March 1984 and 31 July 1988. The Minister is shaking his head, either because he does not have the records or because he is not prepared to agree to the provision. If the latter, it is a pity that he did not say so during his speech. If the former—that he does not have details of those who applied—it means that 8,000 British farmers eligible, in theory, for admission to the scheme cannot apply because the Ministry does not have records of their applications.

Mr. MacGregor: It is the latter case. I opposed that provision in the Commission's proposals. I am glad to say that it does not now appear that it will be included.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Davies: I share the delight of Conservative Members. However, it is somewhat remiss of the Minister not to say that what appear in the document as the conditions that will apply do not meet with his agreement, and that the House is being asked to take note not of this

[Mr. Davies]

document but of an amended document. We do not know what those amendments will be. I like to think that the right hon. Gentleman treats the House with a degree of integrity. He should be prepared to say how the document will be amended and how the criteria will apply.

As the Minister has volunteered that snippet of information, I shall press him further. Will he give an assurance that the criteria will not have to be met?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows that there is qualified majority voting. It is not open to one Minister to give an absolute assurance on how negotiations will end. I said that I opposed the proposal, and I have support for that. I do not think that it will be in the final scheme.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to the Minister for that concession. I shall test him once more—*[Interruption.]* We do not often have time to debate these matters. If Conservative Members want to take me on, I shall be happy to take them on during the remaining 22 minutes. I have legitimate points to make and these matters must be properly debated in the House. We have already had one important admission from the Minister, and I want one more.

If there is to be a similar provision—that to meet the eligibility criteria applicants will have had to have lodged their applications with the Ministry between 31 March 1984 and 31 July 1988—in the light of the Minister's reservations, will he assure us that there are adequate records of any British farmers who made applications verifying that they lodged applications during the relevant period? That appears to me to be a simple and straightforward question. If the Minister will give the undertaking that that information is available in his Department, I shall be happy with that.

A number of questions were asked by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), the answers to which we would be interested to hear. We, too, have a number of questions. How is the quota to be apportioned; and what percentage of the additional quota does the Minister believe will be available to the United Kingdom? How many applications have so far been made? How many applications are held by his Department? If the criteria discussed earlier are to be enforced, how many applications have been made? How many of those applicants would meet the necessary criteria? How many British dairy farmers, who took advantage of the two outgoers schemes in 1978, would be eligible for this scheme if it were accepted as it presently stands? Those are specific questions which we are entitled to have answered.

The Minister was very candid when he said that the Commission had been forced into taking this initiative —if we can call it that—which was reactive and for which we expressedd our support. Of course, that was the minimum that was compatible with the judgment. We do not criticise the Government for the way in which they have presented this or for their behaviour so far. However, for all of us, it is a sorry reminder of the inadequacies of the common agricultural policy, and it should remain a spur both to the Government and to Opposition to achieve a radical reform of that policy. That is the real lesson to be learnt from this debate.

11.12 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson): I am surprised that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) said that everything should have been cut and dried before we came into the Chamber; if it had been, all the speeches in the debate would have been worthless and useless, and there would have been no point in having the debate. The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who asked for the debate to be split into two halves, would also have been wasting his time. The hon. Member has gone, but he will be here again. The Scrutiny Committee asked for the debate so that the Minister could get the flavour of opinion in the House on this important issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) began with an intervention saying that we could perhaps change the rules altogether; that has been taken up and, of course, has been brought to my right hon. Friend's attention.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) covered many of the matters which were subsequently reinforced. Initially, he asked what the attitude was of other member states. He named Germany, Denmark and the Mediterranean countries. He wisely chose three divergent opinions. The Germans want a less restrictive scheme than we do. They want to allow in, perhaps, all the people who were excluded all those years ago, and they want to allow in part-time farmers. The Danes support my right hon. Friend in wanting a more restrictive scheme. I am not sure whether the Danes support the Germans in the introduction of part-time farmers, but we certainly do not.

The southern and Mediterranean countries are asking, as the hon. Member for Caerphilly has done, for a renegotiation, a payback: "Let us do a deal. What will we get out of it?" Perhaps we could have expected such attitudes.

The hon. Member for South Shields said that, when and if quotas are reallocated, they should be non-negotiable. My right hon. Friend has already said that if those quotas are reallocated, he will try to ensure that they are not transferrable and non-negotiable. It is a special scheme with special quotas and I hope that we can draw up special rules.

The hon. Members for South Shields and for Ceredigion and Pembroke (Mr. Howells) also asked whether quotas will go on for ever and whether there will be Euro-trading in them. The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke also asked whether there will be a milk shortage after 1992; whether there will be transnational quotas and whether British dairy farmers will be able to compete on equal terms. I can only answer yes to the last question. The Minister and previous Ministers have done their best and have succeeded in ensuring that our farmers can compete on equal terms. I would need to look into the crystal ball to be able to give the hon. Gentleman any reasonable answers to the rest of his questions. Perhaps he can have a word with Merlin when he pops home.

I should like to reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) said about my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). The work that my right hon. Friend did during the introduction of quotas is now being recognised. I have been to farmers' meetings where they have said straight out that they did not realise that it would all turn out as well as it has—I am sure that at the time my right hon. Friend knew that it would. It is because of my right hon. Friend's hard work that we now have such a sensible system.

My right hon. Friend will be reassured to know that my right hon. Friend the Minister is following in his footsteps by hounding the Italians at every stage. The only way in which we can guarantee that British farmers are not disadvantaged is to ensure that all the member states of the EC stick to the rules that are imposed by a qualified majority or a unanimous vote. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale said that the court judgment was grotesque, and since then many people have supported that statement.

I have already said that this is a special quota dealing with a special category. The hon. Member for Caerphilly said that the terms of the quota should have been chiselled on stone in black and white to prevent alterations. I am sure that he will accept that all the terms will be the subject of negotiation in Brussels during the long hours of deliberations.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be highly desirable if the European Court of Justice decisions could be attributable to the judgments made by individual judges? Then we would know who made the majority decisions in that court.

Mr. Thompson: It might help my hon. Friend, but it would not help me. It would not alter the case. I shall not be led down that path tonight—perhaps one afternoon in the Smoking Room.

The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) left the Chamber after advocating what I would have called, to provoke him had he been present, a free market in milk. However, as he is absent, I shall not bother.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) mentioned costs. He will have read the financial implications given in the explanatory memorandum:

> "The Commission estimates the cost of increasing the Community reserve, measured in disposal terms, at 90 MECU (£59·9m). In addition the 0·5 per cent. reduction in co-responisbility levy will reduce receipts by 20 MECU (£13·3m) giving a total cost of 110 MECU (·73·2m). Against this is set the savings of 74 MECU (£49·3m) from the reduction in the intervention support price for butter leaving an overall deficit for the proposals of 36 MECU (£24m)."

However, my right hon. Friend and others in the Council are striving to neutralise the effects of that half a million tonnes of butter as much as possible.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: How?

Mr. Thompson: How unusual. I turn, expecting my hon. Friend to be extending his hand. I move on.

The kind contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) was most welcome. He spoke clearly for the dairy farmers in his constituency.

As to the remarks of the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), we agree that in Britain, 8,000 farmers took up the various outgoers' schemes. In Europe alone, 6 million tonnes of butter were removed, and in Great Britain we took out 20 per cent. of our production. How many farmers will want to return under the scheme is not known, but those in Great Britain who satisfy the conditions when they finally emerge amended and not unamended—and I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the satisfaction, which word I do not use in any derogatory sense, of saying that they will not be unamended—will be able to join the scheme, as will all European members.

Mr. Ron Davies: For the sake of the accuracy of the record, will the Minister confirm that his Department has accurate records of those applicants who participated in the two outgoers schemes in 1978 and who, after the introduction of quotas, subsequently made quota applications?

Mr. Thompson: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a categorical answer to his question this evening. I shall take it up with my officials and see exactly what the situation is. It is no use doing the work twice. We must first see how the scheme as amended turns out.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I refer to a constituency case that I thought was dead—that concerning Eric Lodge. The Minister may recall that Mr. Lodge's land was only good for milk production because of previous opencasting. Subsidence wrecked his cow house and all his feeding sheds, and by the time the board put that right, the quota was introduced—so he had a marvellous farm and cow house but no cows. That was because of the quota system. He made a quota application but was turned down. Is it possible that the new provision will allow him to enter the scheme again?

Mr. Thompson: Distressing though the case is, I do not think that that gentleman will fall within the ambit of the scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke mentioned the 64 per cent. of hardship cases—cases like that of the hon. Gentleman's friend—that were initially turned down. I do not think that I can give the hon. Gentleman any hope, but I shall look into the matter if he will write to me about it. I shall also write to the hon. Member for Caerphilly if I can get together a reasonable and concrete letter without undue expenditure of time and money. Once the document has been amended and has passed through the Council, we shall have a clearer idea of the answers that he has asked for.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8108/88 on milk and milk products and of the Government's intention to pursue agreement which meets the requirements of the European Court's judgement while containing costs and ensuring that the effectiveness of milk quotas is maintained.

New Zealand Butter

11.25 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8961/88 on New Zealand butter and of the Government's intention to pursue agreement to these proposals which meet the aim of establishing arrangements for the continued access of New Zealand butter on special terms for the period 1989-92 in a way which represents a reasonable balance between the interests of those involved.

The document contains the Commission's proposals for dealing with future arrangements for the import of New Zealand butter into this country. The treaty of accession to the Community, in recognition of our traditional trading links with New Zealand, provided that decreasing quantities of New Zealand butter could be imported over a five-year period at a reduced rate of import levy. The treaty also provided that the arrangements could be extended by unanimous decision of the Council of Ministers, acting on the basis of a Commission proposal.

The importance to New Zealand of its butter exports to this country was acknowledged by Community Heads of Government meeting in Dublin in 1975, and the special arrangements have been extended by the Council on a number of occasions since then. The quantities of New Zealand butter permitted to enter the United Kingdom at the preferential rate of levy have been reduced from just over 165,800 tonnes in 1973 to 74,500 tonnes in 1988, reflecting the continuing decline in United Kingdom butter consumption.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): What has been the percentage reduction in the consumption of butter in this country since the last time the New Zealand quota was decided?

Mr. MacGregor: I have not the precise figures for the last three years. I think that the reduction is between 5 and 7·5 per cent., but I shall check the figure, and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will respond at the end of the debate.

That substantial and continuing decline in consumption—it is probably rather larger than my figures suggest—is one of the problems facing the dairy sector as a whole.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): In 1976 the Commission recommended that the figure for New Zealand imports should be 25 per cent. but, because consumption has fallen, New Zealand butter now accounts for 37 per cent. of the market.

Mr. MacGregor: Those figures are not quite right, but I shall deal with my hon. Friend's point later.

The present arrangements for New Zealand butter imports expire at the end of the year. The document explains the Commission's proposals for the continuation of imports between 1989 and 1992. The proposals have two main elements. First, a cut of 10,000 tonnes in the quantity of imports, to 64,500 tonnes, is proposed for 1989, followed by equal annual reductions to 55,000 tonnes in 1992. Secondly, it is proposed to reduce the rate of levy from 25 to 15 per cent. of the butter intervention price from 1 January 1989.

The proposed reduction in the quantity of New Zealand butter imports over the next four years reflects the trend since accession and the continuing fall in overall United Kingdom butter consumption. The proposed reduction in the rate of import levy would partly offset the loss in revenue to New Zealand from the cut in quantity. The Commission's proposals would therefore be consistent with the Community's international obligations. They imply a reduction of 26 per cent. in New Zealand imports by 1992, which is twice the reduction in Community milk production since the introduction of milk quotas, and more than double the annual percentage rate of reduction in butter imports under the previous arrangements. However, in terms of the total United Kingdom butter market, our estimates suggest that if the Commission's proposals were adopted, New Zealand supplies would represent about the same share of the market as they do under the present arrangements.

The Commission's proposals would ensure continuity of supply of New Zealand butter to the British consumer. We believe that it would be unlikely to have any significant effect on retail prices, or any significant adverse effect on the United Kingdom and Community taxpayer. Now that the support arrangements in the milk sector have been tightened and intervention stocks substantially reduced, it is unlikely that significant quantities of butter will enter public storage in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the budgetary costs of the concession to New Zealand will be considerably lower than might previously have been the case.

I should like to emphasise one point about which there is still considerable misunderstanding among United Kingdom farmers. As New Zealand and all other butter imports were excluded from the original calculation of United Kingdom dairy quotas—the original basis was past production by our own producers—whatever decisions are taken about the future arrangements, they will have no effect on United Kingdom quotas. It is important to stress that point, because there is a great deal of misunderstanding about it. Some people believe that if New Zealand butter imports were reduced even further than is provided for in the Commission's proposals that would lead to an increase in United Kingdom dairy quotas. It would not.

I have a few words to say about the amendment. The concerns that are expressed there are fully met by the Commission's proposals.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Some members of the Council of Agriculture Ministers have criticised the package and may have been trying to unravel it. How does the Minister view his role in regard to those critics? Is he actively promoting the package, and will he continue to do so?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall make my position on that clear at the end of my speech. It would be more natural to do so in that context. There are many varying points of view on both this and many other proposals that are before the Council of Ministers. Criticism has been voiced by many Ministers, often from conflicting standpoints. Some of them are inevitably linking the butter proposals with the sheepmeat proposals, because New Zealand is involved in both. My view is that there is no legal link between the two, but some Ministers are making that link. The sheepmeat proposals are being criticised widely by nearly all Ministers—again from many different points of view. There is nothing unusual about that.

As for some of the concerns that have been expressed —not least in the amendment, which has not been called, but which highlights some of the concerns—I believe that the Commission's proposals meet them. It is important to remember, as I have stressed throughout, that butter consumption in the United Kingdom has been falling for a number of years, and I expect it to continue to fall. If the proposal is adopted, I expect the New Zealand share of the total United Kingdom butter market to fall only very slightly—so slightly that its share will be about the same as it is now over the four years of the agreement. I expect the New Zealand share of the packet butter market to continue to increase somewhat, as it has done in recent years. Consumer choice would therefore be broadly the same.

As for the consistency of the proposal with the Community's commitments at the start of the Uruguay round, which we shall discuss in the mid-term review in Montreal next week, it could be argued that as the New Zealand arrangement is a unilateral concession by the Community there is no legal obligation on the Community to maintain it after it runs out at the end of this year. The New Zealanders are, however, perfectly at liberty to appeal to the spirit of these undertakings to justify continued access. It is in any event reasonable that the proposal should provide for a continuing reduction in the New Zealand quota in line with what has happened in the past and with the continuing decline in our butter market. The proposal is consistent with the Community's commitments on the Uruguay round and, as my hon. Friends will have noticed, it is endorsed by the New Zealand Government.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My right hon. Friend is trying to justify the proposal, but in view of the dramatically changed circumstances since we joined the Community, the advent of quotas and the reduction in butter consumption, can we continue to justify the substantial import of New Zealand butter, bearing in mind the loss of jobs in creameries throughout the country and the grave problems faced by many people in creameries and other areas of milk and butter manufacture?

Mr. MacGregor: New Zealand has accepted reductions in British imports of its butter recently in line with reductions in butter consumption. Under these proposals there will be a rather sharper decline in butter imports than there will be in milk quotas in the Community. Any reductions in imports from New Zealand, however, would not have any effect on quotas and, therefore, on creameries.

We have still to take a decision on these matters in Council. In theory it will be done before the end of the calendar year, but the recent progress in the Council of Ministers leads me to suggest that we might be being optimistic in thinking that we will reach agreement before the end of the calendar year. This is therefore an opportune moment for the House to express its views. I suspect that, in contrast to the previous debate, we shall hear some contrary views on this subject, just as very different points of view are being expressed in the Council.

Many interests are involved—Community producers, consumers and taxpayers—and there are the Community's obligations to New Zealand. The Government believe that the Commission's proposals represent a reasonable balance between them, and that is the point of view that I have been expressing in the Council.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I *have to tell the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the* amendment in the names of the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) and his hon. Friends.

11.37 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): The Minister rightly said that this is probably an issue which will prove quite divisive and lively. We have had some good debates on it. It stirs many emotions. I do not apologise for that. The House knows that politics is not always determined by logic. Sometimes it is determined by emotion.

Many of us feel that we owe a debt of gratitude to the New Zealand people. Some of us remember that, in the early 1970s, when we were arguing the case against our entry into the EEC, one of our greatest worries was what the status of New Zealand would be. Many of us were very pleased that we were able to achieve protocol 18 of the 1972 accession legislation, which gave some continuity and hope to New Zealand dairying.

The New Zealanders have adapted remarkably. They now send considerably less butter to Britain than they did in 1972. According to a parliamentary answer given to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) on 2 February, in 1986, 27 per cent. of the United Kingdom butter market was provided by New Zealand. I use the Government's figures.

As we consider the argument and the problems that the Minister faces in negotiations in the Council of Ministers, we hope that he will fight the New Zealand corner—and we wish him well.

I regret that there is a considerable amount of misinformation—I use that word and not "disinformation"—about this matter and regret the hostility from the National Farmers Union of England and Wales, the Milk Marketing Board and the Farmers Union of Wales, which feel that the New Zealand Government and people are being treated too generously. I do not share that view.

I remind the House and the NFU that farmers in New Zealand produce that butter without a single penny of subsidy and that they can send that butter halfway round the world and jump a tariff barrier of about £500 per tonne, and still compete with European butter. We are talking about a very efficient argriculture, which is not protected.

In enunciating such views, I take comfort from the fact that I have the support not only of many of my hon. Friends but of hon. Members of all parties. I was pleased to see early-day motion 543 in the last Parliament. It was sponsored by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and others, and attracted over 200 signatures. I note that there is an amendment to this motion that broadly goes along the same lines and urges the Government to stand up and fight for the New Zealand point of view.

There is considerable misunderstanding about this matter. As I go around the country and talk to farmers and at NFU group meetings, I find the misconception that if we could get rid of the New Zealanders, our milk quota would be increased. Therefore, it was rewarding to hear

[Dr. David Clark]

the Minister state the position categorically. We cannot repeat it too often. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) repeated it clearly in a written answer on 8 May 1986:

> "The United Kingdom milk quota, like those of other member states, is based on past national production levels with no account being taken of imports from New Zealand or any other source."—[*Official Report*, 8 May 1986; Vol. 97, c. *238*.]

I have repeated that because it needs repeating as the message has still not got across, and it is because the message has not got across that there are so many misconceptions.

Another misconception is that we guarantee a market for New Zealand butter. Of course we do not. What we do guarantee is the opportunity of entry for New Zealand butter. Once the butter is in this country, it must compete with every other brand or make of butter, whatever its origin, on a strictly commercial basis. People buy New Zealand butter because by and large they want to buy New Zealand butter. They do not buy it because there is no alternative. The brand name "Anchor" is one of the premier brand names in this country. I hesitate to mention this, but I think that I should remind hon. Members of what the Prime Minister said on 19 May:

> "People here still wish to purchase that country's butter. —[*Official Report*, 19 May 1988; Vol. 133, c. 1088.]

It would be wrong for us to take steps that are too rigorous and to stop people having the choice of New Zealand butter. We in the Labour party believe that people should have the freedom to choose that brand of butter.

As we have heard, the consumption of butter has been falling in recent years. I suggest that, if we took draconian steps and banned New Zealand butter, as some responsible people advocate, consumption of butter would fall even further.

As with many other products, demand for butter is sustained and stimulated by advertising. I think that about £8 million a year is spent on advertising it in Britain, and of that amount, £6 million is contributed by the New Zealand Dairy Board. If New Zealand butter was not coming into Britain, that shortfall in advertising would not be made up and the result would be an even steeper fall in the consumption of butter in Britain. Overall, British butter producers would not benefit.

Another reason for being careful about restricting the access of New Zealand butter—the Ministers touched upon this—is the whole issue of the current GATT negotiations. I am mindful, as I know the Minister is, that the next round of the Uruguay talks will take place on 5 December in Montreal. The spirit of most countries is that world agricultural trade should be liberalised and subsidies reduced, with resulting benefit to Third-world and other countries. That spirit is correct.

The EEC has given a commitment to liberalise trade and it would seem strange if at the same time we were leaning towards more protectionism by restricting the entry of New Zealand butter. As I have said, just over one quarter, 27 per cent., of the United Kingdom butter market is in the hands of the New Zealanders. They have obtained it through competition and brand loyalty. The Opposition are committed to the entry of New Zealand butter to Britain.

I realise that the Minister is engaged in a complicated set of negotiations involving not only butter. As he says, there is also lamb, which is covered by a firm GATT agreement. The issue of top fruit was discussed earlier this year. I hope that the message he takes from the House is that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members—including all Opposition Members and probably a majority of Conservative Members—feel that it is his duty to go to Europe and fight the other Ministers on behalf of the New Zealand producers. That is the will and the desire of the British people.

11.47 pm

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): I beg to move, at the end of the Question to add,

> 'but much regrets the restriction on consumer choice for British housewives caused by the proposed further reduction of 25 per cent. in the New Zealand quota, and urges Her Majesty's Government to consider whether the proposal is consistent with the pledge given by all the participating nations at the start of the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade that no new barriers to trade would be introduced while the negotiations continued.'.

I hope that my hon. Friends who have come into the Chamber clutching their briefs from the National Farmers Union will go back to their constituencies echoing what has been said about the effect that any cut in quota will have on our dairy farmers. It is not only our dairy farmers who will be affected, but our arable farmers too. I am glad to say that I have many arable farmers in my constituency. We should never talk about milk or milk products without having regard to the interests of the arable farmers who produce the feed grains that go to the dairy herds.

For the life of me I can see no prospect of any arable or dairy farmer benefiting in the slightest by the proposed cut in butter imports. Surely it is common sense that not a tonne, not an ounce, not a pat of New Zealand butter can come to Britain unless the British people say that they wish to buy it. No one can dispute that. Therefore, we are talking about an attack on the preferences of the British people.

The New Zealand Dairy Board has for decades been advertising butter and promoting it in a way that the Milk Marketing Board has failed to do. It is a disgrace that the Milk Marketing Board insists that we must agree to cuts in the imports of New Zealand butter when it has done so little for decades to promote butter and has left it to the New Zealanders to do the task.

The New Zealand Dairy Board has not only advertised butter and promoted it for years, but has gone out of its way to blend a type of butter to suit the British palate. It has taken endless pains to achieve that end. According to all the market research, the majority of people prefer to eat that kind of butter, which is blended to suit their palate. Therefore, if there is a further cut in the amount of butter that we shall be allowed to eat of our own choice, that is an attack on freedom of choice. That is something that we treasure and wish to promote.

I know that my right hon. Friend will go to the Council of Ministers and fight hard for our consumers. I hope that he will draw the attention of his colleagues to protocol 18 of the treaty of accession, to which he referred earlier on. It is because of that protocol that we are required to import a declining quantity of New Zealand butter.

That article had two parts to it. One was that we would accept a decline in the amount of New Zealand butter that we were allowed to eat, and the other was a pledge by the Common Market not to do anything to frustrate New Zealand from seeking markets elsewhere. We debated that for a long time. Those of us who can remember those awful dreary debates that we had about our accession to the Community will remember that New Zealand butter was one of the main sticking points, and we were given an assurance that the EEC would do nothing to make it difficult for New Zealand to find export markets elsewhere.

What happened? Our butter production went up, and when New Zealand sought to sell butter to Hong Kong, an island without a single dairy cow, as far as I know, and almost on the doorstep of New Zealand—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Well, we live in a small world. If I have my geography right, New Zealand is nearer to Hong Kong than to the Common Market. However, when New Zealand tried to promote the sale of butter at a competitive price to Hong Kong, in went butter from the Common Market, dumped at a ridiculous price, so New Zealand lost that market. New Zealand went to Moscow and sought a market there, and again butter from the EEC was dumped and it lost that market. Wherever the New Zealand Dairy Board has sought an outlet for its products, the EEC has gone in and denied it that market.

The Common Market has broken the pledge that it gave under protocol 18 of the treaty of accession. I hope that my right hon. Friend will emphasise that when he mets his colleagues. New Zealand has cut its dairy production again and again, although it is the lowest cost producer in the world. It has fought hard to find markets elsewhere, but every time that it has done so it has been thwarted by the funds—raised from our money—of the Community.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will emphasise a point that was mentioned by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and is included in the amendment—the fact that the Common Market gave a further pledge at the beginning of the Uruguay round not to impose any fresh barrier upon trade with third countries until the completion of the GATT negotiations. If the Community goes ahead with that further barrier against New Zealand's trade with us, it will be in breach of that undertaking. I hope that the Community will not contemplate that step until the GATT negotiations are complete.

I am sure that the House and the consumers of this country will wish my right hon. Friend well in his negotiations. I hope that our farmers also will wish him well, in the knowledge that they cannot lose by New Zealand continuing to send butter to this country. The promotion of butter needs to be financed by the New Zealand Dairy Board to sustain our dairy farmers. It is a paradox that our dairy farmers have in the past gained as a result of the board's skills in promoting butter in the past few decades.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will give the firmest assurances that he will argue as strenuously as he can for the interests of the British people.

11.56 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I do not have an interest to declare, but I am married to a New Zealander and breed New Zealanders in captivity under licence in this country part-time.

I was in New Zealand throughout the 1960s as the New Zealand equivalent of Robin Day, although not as well paid. I remember a series of British Ministers, both Conservative and Labour, coming out throughout the 1960s. I interviewed most of them and on television and to the public generally they gave solemn and sincere assurances that New Zealand interests would be safeguarded and defended by the British Government, that New Zealand would have continued access to the British market and that the traditional and close trading relationship would be maintained. Those assurances were given by Minister after Minister into the 1970s, when we finally went into the EEC. Perhaps New Zealand was a little trusting in heeding those assurances without demanding more definite quid pro quos, but they were certainly intended at the time. I regard it, therefore, as a matter of honour, and the curtailment of New Zealand access, which is implicit in these proposals, is wrong and immoral.

The Minister, whose work has been impressive in many other spheres, has not fought has strenuously as I and many of his hon. Friends should have liked to defend New Zealand's access to this market. The reduction in quota from 165,000 tonnes in 1973 to 55,000 tonnes in 1992 is a 26 per cent. reduction on 1988 imports and is a faster rate of reduction than before.

The butter negotiations have been tied in with the sheepmeat treaty, which was a treaty obligation. They should not have been tied together. The Minister's position has been more ambiguous than it should have been. His defence of New Zealand interests has not been as strong as I should have liked. I can understand that, because it is not a happy position for a Conservative Minister of Agriculture to be unpopular with those involved in agriculture. By reducing milk output, he has not been in the happy position of his right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) when he was Minister of Agriculture.

It is wrong that the National Farmers Union, individual farmers and Conservative Back-Bench Members should attack New Zealand access. Their argument is misguided, as the Minister has said. It is wrong even to insinuate that there should be a reduction of the New Zealand quota. A reduction of New Zealand butter imports would not lead to a better milk quota for the United Kingdom. If there were to be an increased quota, it would be followed pari passu by the other members of the EEC. The effect in the United Kingdom would be minuscule. There would be an increase in the price of milk and, therefore, an increase in the price of butter. The consumption of butter would decrease and the only beneficiaries would be the margarine manufacturers, not the farmers who are attacking New Zealand access. It seems that we would be going to a great deal of trouble to benefit the margarine manufacturers.

The Minister should have fought more strenuously in Britain and in the rest of Europe. It is clear that we do not have a good deal. I warn the Minister that there will be anger in the House. That is shown clearly by early-day motion No. 543 of the previous Session, which was signed by over 200 Members, and by the amendment which has been moved tonight. There will be anger in the country as well if the Minister does not respond. He must fight to the utmost to prevent any undermining that could follow from what has already happened.

We have a moral obligation to New Zealand. Furthermore, there is a consumer issue. Consumers want New Zealand butter. They like New Zealand butter and they buy it. They are accustomed to the taste of New Zealand butter. Consumer organisations want sustained

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

access for New Zealand so that consumers can buy the butter that they want and should be able to secure. It is unreasonable for the Minister to say that, because consumers want New Zealand butter and because the product can hold its share of the market, it is legitimate to reduce access in order to increase market share because of consumer preference. That is a tortuous argument.

As has been said, New Zealand is the only substantial advertiser of butter. Of the £8 million that was spent on advertising butter last year, £6 million was spent by New Zealand. Against that, £16 million is spent on advertising margarine. It is clear that the consumer wants New Zealand butter, and as a result of advertising New Zealand is sustaining the demand for butter generally.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: What is the hon. Gentleman's attitude to Icelandic cod in Grimsby?

Mr. Mitchell: That is a silly question at this moment. It is irrelevant as well. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman regards it as a humorous question. In fact, we want Icelandic cod in Grimsby because we want to maintain the processing side of the industry. Similarly, the consumer wants New Zealand butter. I do not see the relevance of the hon. Gentleman's question, but he has his answer.

This is a trade issue as New Zealand is one of the few countries in the world with which Britain trades successfully. Our annual trade with New Zealand amounts to £1 billion—visibles and invisibles—and we are actually in surplus. That is a unique phenomenon for Britain. At a time when we have such a horrendous trade deficit, why should we allow a substantial market for British goods and services to be undermined by the reductions in quota that are implicit in the document? We should support our markets and our friends.

As the hon Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) said, protocol 18 of the treaty of accession gave solemn undertakings that the EEC would not frustrate New Zealand's efforts to develop alternative markets and to diversify its sales. That undertaking has not been kept in any respect. Wherever New Zealand has tried to develop alternative markets for butter, wherever it has got its butter exports going, it has been counteracted by large-scale dumping of EEC butter. That was done not only to compete with New Zealand's exports, but to depress the price of butter on the world market. The solemn obligation has in no way been sustained by the EEC. Having failed in that crucial respect, although New Zealand took the plunge and agreed to diversify its markets, to start now to reduce New Zealand's access to this market is unreasonable.

New Zealand's share of the British butter market went down from one third in 1970 to about 27 per cent. in 1986. Despite all my efforts to the contrary—and I have been magnificent—the butter market has shrunk. It is half what it was when we entered the EEC. New Zealand's trade has diversified enormously. Nine tenths of its trade came here before the war. Now nine tenths of it goes elsewhere, but 45 per cent. of New Zealand's butter export earnings are still made in this market. It is crucial to the New Zealand economy because 14 per cent. of New Zealand's total exports come from the dairy industry.

Curtailment of the quota will be a bitter blow for an economy that is facing real difficulties. For a highly efficient primary producer, which developed as this country's farm in the antipodes, it will be a bitter blow to farmers whose standards of living have been cut drastically and who have been hit hard by what has happened to world agricultural trade. This will be a further blow which we in this country should not countenance.

Why should we cut New Zealand's access to this market in any respect? I regard the Minister's stand on this as equivocal. What economic sense does it make to penalise New Zealand—the most efficient producer in the world, with which we trade successfully and in surplus—and to be forced to buy over-priced, inefficiently produced butter from the EEC, from nations with which we are in a horrendous trade deficit, which is getting worse every year? The proposal to cut quotas will be a serious blow to our trade with New Zealand. The proposal is a moral and political folly of national self-interest. We should not reduce the quota, as the Minister evisages; we should sustain New Zealand's access as much as we possibly can.

12.7 am

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): There is no point in discussing this issue unless we put it in the context of decision making within the European Community. That lays down the framework of the debate.

It is not an option to preserve the status quo, because the present entitlement lapses at the end of the year and legally the Community could simply say that no butter should be imported if the rules are not renewed. As the original agreement talks about transitional arrangements, that clearly envisaged progressive reductions.

However, it is not an option to seek to wipe New Zealand off the face of the map. There are reasons for that. First, there is a common interest between the Community and New Zealand in trying to maintain prices on the world market. There has been some success. The minimum price was $1,000 per tonne at the start of the year, $1,100 in March and $1,250 in September; it is now being traded at $1,400 and some sales have been concluded at $1,600 per tonne, including sales by the New Zealand Dairy Board. Secondly, in the light of the GATT negotiations, the Community would not be in good order going into those negotiations if it were to introduce the proposed cuts for the New Zealand quota which were out of line with the reductions that had been progressive over previous years.

That is the framework within which the decisions must be taken. A political compromise will be struck and the interest lies in the requirements for the compromise. I believe that the first interest is a continuing choice for the consumer in the United Kingdom and availability of New Zealand butter broadly with the same proportion that we had before, in a declining market place, as all hon. Members have noticed. The second is a fair deal for New Zealand, because, as hon. Members have said, New Zealand has invested in the marketing network in the United Kingdom and put a major proportion of its advertising expenditure into the United Kingdom and is entitled to look for a fair revenue for its producers.

The final requirement is justice for British and European farmers, who have taken significant cuts in their quotas and who feel that all participants in the market place should share that burden, although they have realised a major capital asset in the dairy quotas. The cost of disposing of the surpluses and making the mountains disappear has been borne by the taxpayer as well as by the producer, and sometimes each side in that equation forgets the other.

On that assessment, is the deal fair? The cuts are not draconian; they are not as high as expected. Most people would have punted the Commission's opening bet at around 50,000 tonnes. It is significantly higher than that. The reduction in the levy seeks to compensate in revenue for the cut in quantities sent by New Zealand farmers. In my experience, what matters to farmers is the bottom line of the account. Consumer choice is preserved because the cuts are broadly in line with those that have taken place historically, and the European farmer cannot say that a 14 per cent. cut in the New Zealand quota is not a severe measure.

It has to be emphasised that any other proposal could be worse. What the Commission has put on the table is the best that New Zealand will get. Any amendment will be worse for New Zealand: that is the political reality. It is an illusion to think that a cut in the New Zealand quota will produce one extra gramme for British dairy farmers. The quota will not be redistributed. We could argue that, if New Zealand butter did not come in, perhaps there would be a little extra for everyone across the Community, but even that is very doubtful. I believe that the reaction of the New Zealanders, with all the marketing effort that they have put in, would be to buy continental butter and put it into Anchor packs. There is nothing to prevent them from marketing continental butter in the United Kingdom under the Anchor label.

The market in Europe is not yet in such perfect balance as people suggest. There may be only 100,000 tonnes of unsold butter in public storage. However, liquid skimmed milk is still being subsidised into calves' feed at 53 ecu a tonne, and skimmed milk powder is being subsidised into calves' feed at 650 ecu per tonne. Therefore, it is ridiculous to talk about the market having undergone some miraculous transition to balance. There is still a long way to go. Butter is being subsidised into pastry-making, ice cream and other manufacturing projects.

The proposals represent a balanced view, and, as my right hon. Friend the Minister said, we have to consider them with the lamb and sheepmeat proposals. Most people consider it a package, although the legal status of the two agreements is wholly different—one is a bilateral deal and one is a voluntary restraint within the overall framework of the GATT. With the proposal to cut the New Zealand lamb entitlement to a level still above the historic level of New Zealand shipments—with some limitation on chilled lamb, which in some senses is more sensitive to the United Kingdom market—the Commission has produced a cleverly worked package, which may be one of Commissioner Andriessen's last measures as Agricultural Commissioner before he takes on his new role as Commissioner for External Relations.

This is a well-wrought deal. It is fair to all the parties concerned, given that the Commission had to square a circle containing very conflicting interests. I believe that the housewife has the same proportion of choice that she had before. The European farmer cannot complain that his pain is not shared by others. The combination of the cuts and the levy change for New Zealand maintains the revenue expectations of that country and justifies its input into the promotion of the butter market.

I commend to my right hon. Friend the view that, within the confines of his negotiations, he should seek to promote the deal, as it comes as near as we are likely to get into the practical political circumstances of producing something supportable, even if all parties are not ecstatic about it. It is a well-wrought package and he would do well to defend it as it now exists.

12.14 am

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): The National Farmers Union and the Government appear to be at loggerheads over the issue of New Zealand butter. Perhaps the Minister will explain why. The NFU represents a large number of producers in this country. The NFU's view is also taken by the Milk Marketing Board, which has served the dairy industry well for the past 50 years. It is also the view of the Dairy Trade Federation. They are all agreed that the New Zealand butter quota should be reduced to 40,000 tonnes next year and be abolished by 1992. There is a great deal of disagreement among the unions, the trade, the Milk Marketing Board and the Government. It would be helpful to know why.

There has been a 15-year transitional period and the dairy trade is wondering how long it will continue. Hon. Members on both sides have said that we would not have an additional milk quota if the New Zealand butter quota were abolished.

I should be grateful for clarification on the question of profitability, which is important to British farmers. The Government are duty bound to look after the interests of their dairy farmers. I still believe that we should treat New Zealand gently and allow it to continue to send butter to this country, and, so long as the Minister does his utmost to safeguard the interests of British dairy producers and consumers, he will have the blessing of my party.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I agree with the remarks of the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells). I especially agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) said in his outstandingly clear speech.

The House is beginning to realise what a contentious issue this is and always has been. Various arguments are deployed. There are those who say that there should be more, even unlimited, access to New Zealand butter. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) has almost made it his life's work to find every conceivable argument from the bottom of the barrel to criticise the European Community. We are all familiar with that, and it is the gist of the amendment. There are others who say that New Zealand butter imports should be abolished as soon as possible.

Like many hon. Members, I have spent a large part of the past four or five years travelling around the country to speak at farmers' meetings. I often met strong objections to New Zealand butter imports. I discovered that almost all the criticism was based on the false assumption that if those imports were abolished there would somehow be increased quotas for Britain and, possibly, the Community. That is erroneous, and my right hon. Friend has nailed that argument. Many of the cries from farmers and the Milk Marketing Board are based on that erroneous assumption. I hope that we can kill that.

We must put the position of New Zealand imports into its historic context. I well remember that in the early 1970s, when we were negotiating to join the Community—the team was led, I think, by Lord Rippon as he now is—some

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

issues came up time and time again. There was the issue of sugar imports from the developing countries, and there was the issue of New Zealand butter imports. I notice that some of the people who, 15 years ago, insisted on the need to maintain New Zealand's share in the United Kingdom butter market are now saying that it should be eliminated altogether so that perhaps our farmers would get some extra quota. That is a silly argument and one to which we should not listen.

I hope that we shall hear no more from the Opposition about it being wrong to reduce the amount of New Zealand butter that has been imported over the years. I remind Members on the Opposition Front Bench that the amount of New Zealand butter imports decreased during the years of their Government, as it was their Minister who negotiated that decrease.

I feel that the proposal to go down to about 55,000 tonnes in 1992 is about right. I understand that the New Zealanders have said that this is the lowest level that they can accept and, like my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon, I was pleasantly surprised that the Commissioner did not put a somewhat lower figure on it. I believe that it is about right, but I warn the Minister that there will be those in the Council of Ministers who will take this proposed figure as the starting point. I can anticipate the arguments of, perhaps, the French and Irish Ministers, who will use this as a starting point from which to negotiate a significantly lower figure. I hope that my right hon. Friend will support the Commission and resist any suggestions that this figure should be further reduced.

I believe that we have a continuing debt to New Zealand because of what it did to support Britain in two world wars, and we should never forget that. It would be a tragic mistake if we were to sell New Zealand down the river, and we are not doing so with these proposals. As my right hon. Friend said, they will mean that New Zealand's share of our butter market will be more or less maintained. That is the key, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will support the Commission in sticking to these proposals.

12.22 am

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate. I have an interest in this matter. The New Zealand dairy products that are imported are processed and prepared for sale at the Anchor Foods factory in Swindon. Some £25 million has been invested in a modern factory, providing excellent working conditions and employing 400 of my constituents. A substantial number of those jobs are for unskilled workers, and, as elsewhere, there is a diminishing number of such jobs in Swindon. There can be little doubt that a reduction of nearly 20,000 tonnes of New Zealand butter during the next four years would mean redundancies among those of my constituents who work for the Anchor Foods company. The loss of £40 million in turnover a year could not easily be replaced by diversification.

Of course, as has been said several times, this is not the final decision of the Community; it is a proposal. Will the Minister give an undertaking that the Government will support this proposal to the full, without the possible consideration of any further concession? If my right hon. Friend is unable to give that commitment or unable to deliver in the negotiations, the viability of the factory in my constituency will be at risk, 400 jobs will be on the line, and to what purpose? It has already been said many times tonight that nothing that happens as a result of the negotiations on New Zealand butter will affect the British farmer one iota. If the total imports of New Zealand butter were distributed throughout the Community, it would give each of our farmers only a couple of extra pints a year.

The housewife has already been mentioned. We should consider what the consumer wants. A survey of more than 1,000 housewives who buy butter was conducted in March and April. It revealed that 84 per cent. of all respondents thought that New Zealand should be able to continue to sell butter in Britain; 9 per cent. disagreed; and 7 per cent. did not know. It revealed that 79 per cent. of all respondents thought the people of Britain should be allowed to buy as much Anchor butter as they want and 54 per cent. of that total expressed their favourable feelings strongly. Do my right hon. and hon. Friends believe in free trade? Do they believe in the consumer's right of free choice in our markets? The survey continued:

> "84 per cent. of all respondents said yes, they did think the British Government should continue to make sure people can buy New Zealand butter in Britain, while 7 per cent. said no and 10 per cent. did not know. Of those 84 per cent., 94 per cent. agreed that the British Government should insist that the Common Market continues to allow people to buy New Zealand butter in Britain. Of those, 30 per cent. expressed their agreement extremely strongly, 31 per cent. very strongly and 30 per cent. fairly strongly."

Is my right hon. Friend the housewife's friend? Will he stick out for the interests of our consumers?

The reduction in the New Zealand butter quota would not increase United Kingdom milk quotas one jot. When the national production levels were originally calculated and the quotas were set, they took no account of New Zealand butter. It is worth repeating what my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) told the Select Committee on Agriculture on 24 February 1987:

> "there is no question that if we did not have the New Zealand butter our quota would in some way be larger; in fact it would not affect the production of farmers, because even if the whole of the New Zealand production was taken over by British butter, all it would mean would be that it would have to come out of our present quota."

One cannot say plainer than that, and my right hon. Friend has repeated that message tonight. Those who believe that that is not the case should read this debate in *Hansard* and appreciate that crucial point.

The only cut in New Zealand dairy imports that could be justified is that which reflects the national, overall reduction in our consumption of butter. When I intervened in my right hon. Friend's speech, he said that, in the past three years, butter consumption had dropped between 5 and 7·5 per cent. We are being asked to contemplate a reduction, however, of more than 25 per cent. in the New Zealand butter import quota for the next four years. I do not believe that those figures are in phase. What we are being asked to agree tonight is in excess of what equity demands, let alone what our consumers require.

The Government should be prepared to return to the table in Brussels and argue for a better deal for New Zealand butter than that contained in the present proposal. I hope that my right hon. Friend will take note of my objections on behalf of my constituents.

12.29 am

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): This is a sad episode in a long and sorry story. Once again representatives of our Government—one devoted to principles of free trade abroad and non-intervention at home—have put before the House documents that do violence to both. That is a great shame. Earlier, it was pointed out that when we joined the Community in 1973, we entered into a compact on behalf of New Zealand whereby it would be limited in the amount of butter that it could send to Britain. However, in the Dublin declaration annexed to the protocol we agreed that the Community would not deprive New Zealand of essential outlets.

It may be thought ironic—or not, as the case may be—that that provision was contained in a Dublin declaration. During Question Time yesterday the Prime Minister said in respect of other Dublin declarations:

"although the Government of the Republic of Ireland make fine-sounding speeches and statements, they do not always seem to be backed up by the appropriate deeds."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1988; Vol. 142, c. 575.]

That accusation can also be made of the Community.

In 1973 we imported about 165,000 tonnes of New Zealand butter. Today the figure is less than half that. Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who seems to be limiting his access to the Chamber—placing himself, unusually, under a voluntary restraint agreement—asked how one could justify continuing New Zealand butter imports. They can be justified because no one is forced to buy New Zealand butter, and imports and sales are determined by consumers. If people did not buy New Zealand butter, not one ounce of it would be imported into this country. New Zealand butter's price is competitive, notwithstanding—and no one has pointed this out—the fact that it attracts a 25 per cent. tariff.

Since 1970 New Zealand's market share has fallen from 33 to 27 per cent. I obtained that figure from a written answer to a question put down by my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett), who asked earlier what the figure was. I know that my hon. Friend is a very busy chap and he may not have noticed that answer to his question.

The reduction in New Zealand butter imports over recent years is significant. I was surprised to hear one of my hon. Friends, who is keen that we should import coal into the United Kingdom from other countries to make our own industry more efficient, take a different line in respect of butter. In much the same way Opposition Members are not keen to see coal imports, but are keen to encourage butter imports. I am sure that that has nothing to do with the demographic and occupational make-up of their constituencies. However, as a representative of some of the finest dairying country in Britain, I can tell the House with complete consistency that, as a believer in free trade, I am convinced New Zealand should continue to enjoy the freest possible access to our markets.

I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who, in an otherwise lucid and realistic speech, remarked that the proposed cuts were not draconian, when they are the largest cuts yet advanced in relation to New Zealand's market, amounting to 25 per cent. over the four-year period, with a cut of 10,000 tonnes this year alone. Notwithstanding the fact that the levy will be reduced from 25 to 15 per cent. that will not compensate New Zealand for its losses on access, which will lead to an overall fall in income of 16 per cent. It has been pointed out that the levy will lead to no compensating or countervailing benefit for British farmers.

Butter consumption is falling, and no doubt it will continue doing so. One reason is that consumers are having to pay many times more for butter than they would in a free market. In 1973, butter prices were the same as margarine. Today, butter is two and a half times more expensive. The reason is the protection racket that is the common agricultural policy. Farmers have done tremendous damage to their own interests by the vigour with which they have supported agricultural protection.

That has dawned on farmers in New Zealand. The New Zealand farmers union makes it clear that farmers there are not rattling the begging bowls as they are in this country. They are firmly committed to the principles of free trade, because they know that if they endorse protectionist policies other countries will do the same and agricultural markets will become organised as they are in the Community, to everyone's cost—consumers, taxpayers and producers alike.

As has been said many times this evening, the Community has not kept faith with New Zealand. Community dumping has disrupted New Zealand's markets all over the world, and, although we have reduced the accumulated surpluses that have so exacerbated the problem, there is still no guarantee that in the future the Community will not seek to invade the markets which it agreed in 1973 would be left to New Zealand.

The linking of the reduction in butter imports with the restraints on lamb imports does fundamental violence to our principles of free trade, not only in this country, but in the Community and the wider world, under the GATT negotiations. We agreed in the Uruguay round that we would not seek to increase protectionist barriers against third countries, yet that is precisely what we are seeking to do in the extension of voluntary restraint agreements on lamb. Under the GATT treaties, New Zealand should be able to export unlimited quantities of lamb to the Community at a tariff of 20 per cent., but that was limited by a voluntary restraint agreement in 1980—the kind of "voluntary agreement" that is reached when someone points a gun at a man's head and asks him to hand over his wallet—to 245,000 tonnes at a tariff of 10 per cent. It is now proposed to reduce that to 205,000 tonnes, with further limits on chilled products.

I cannot understand how we can hold our heads high in the world while saying that we favour the reduction of trade barriers and then bring proposals such as this to the House. I appreciate the realism of the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon. I accept that the proposal is probably the best that we shall get. I am not trying to justify it; I am merely being realistic. It is vital that we advertise to people, not only in this country, but elsewhere in the Community, that this is where the buck stops, that the New Zealand Government have reluctantly accepted that this is the best deal that they will get, and look to our Ministers to fight for them as they have in the past and as they have recently declared they will continue to do.

I urge my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to do just that—to stand up for New Zealand, for Britain and for British consumers.

12.37 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I shall keep my remarks very brief, as the hour is late. I thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) made an excellent speech, and I hope one day to emulate his knowledge of these matters.

The debate has been interesting, and I have found it most informative. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) pointed out, we receive many briefs on these important issues, not least from our own Whips Office, and they help us to form a sensible judgment on what we should do. One element, however, has been lacking in the debate. We have concentrated entirely on circumstances relating to a particular Commission proposal. I should like my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to tell us how he envisages the position in 1992. If, as my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon suggested, this is the best that we can expect, that will still leave 55,000 tonnes in 1992, when the single European market comes into being.

I take my right hon. Friend's point that any further reduction in New Zealand butter imports would not affect our dairy farmers' quota now. However, the quota arrangement is not permanent but temporary. By about 1992 the quota regime will have to be reconsidered.

The House has shown tonight that it is committed to the moral obligation that was entered into in 1973 to allow access to New Zealand imports, but it is fair to place on record the fact that some hon. Members are equally concerned—in some cases more concerned—about farming interests in our own constituencies. Young dairy farmers, looking to the future, are asking, "What future is there for us in dairy farming, taking into account the present balance in the market place?" We must take their views into account.

I think that the House ought to accept the Commission's proposals, but we shall have to return to the problem. The conflicts that are emerging will have to be addressed. When the single market is in place, I believe that the other member states will resist the import of any New Zealand butter. Our farmers will then ask why all the New Zealand butter has to come to this country.

12.40 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): My right hon. Friend the Minister has referred to the special regard that the United Kingdom has for New Zealand. He also pointed out that the treaty of Rome reflects that fact. The proposals that we are discussing are a further reflection of that relationship. The largest ANZAC ceremony outside Australasia is held every year on Cannock Chase. Therefore, the Cannock area has a special regard for New Zealand.

I am somewhat sceptical about the EEC. Its attitude towards New Zealand butter is most depressing. I have not participated in previous debates on EEC documents. The document that relates to this debate runs to about 60 pages. It is full of information and figures, and it has made most interesting reading. A most interesting fact is that the document contains scarcely any reference to the consumer. It is an entirely producer-dominated and orientated document. The omission of the consumer from the document confirms that the common agricultural policy has established completely wrong priorities.

Many hon. Members have referred to the arrangements that have been entered into to reduce the amount of New Zealand butter that is permitted to enter the United Kingdom. Imports have been reduced from 166,000 tonnes to 74,500 tonnes during last year. The New Zealand share of the market has not remained static: its share has fallen from 33 per cent. to 27 per cent. It has already suffered a cut. Tonight, New Zealand is being asked to take a further cut and to shoulder a further share of the burden.

Apart from having to accept quota restrictions, New Zealand has also had to pay the levy and compete against home-produced and EEC products. Notwithstanding those hurdles and the falling demand for butter, New Zealand managed to ensure that in 1987 the retail sale price of new Zealand butter in small packs was about 4·4 per cent. less than the price of equivalent United Kingdom butter.

Anchor butter remains the houswife's favourite butter. It has always been and it remains my favourite butter. When I was at school I took it home to Germany where I lived to ensure that I did not have to eat German butter. I have been consistent throughout.

Despite high butter stocks in the United Kingdom, the consumer is clearly exercising his or her choice and preference for New Zealand butter. I am distressed that the Commission is proposing yet more reductions in New Zealand butter quotas. By 1992, they will have fallen to 55,000 tonnes, which is precisely one third of the 1973 quota. The House has to consider how far the Commission may press us in the future. Presumably, it wants ultimately to reduce the figure to zero.

I believe that the interests of the consumer in this matter are paramount, but there are other considerations such as historical association and the fact that New Zealand has tried, with great success, to restructure and liberalise its enonomy. Moreover, we earn more money from our trade with New Zealand than it earns from us.

I hope that the Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary will take heart from the message given by the House that they should go out and fight for the interests of the British consumer and our friends and allies in New Zealand.

12.45 am

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): This has been one of the most realistic and agreeable debates on EEC affairs for many months, probably because of the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body). I want to speak for only one minute.

I hope that the Government will accept that what they are proposing is a reduction in consumer choice. The House should face that fact. The Government may take the view that the proposed reduction of one quarter is consistent with what they think will be the reduction in butter consumption, but nobody can argue that butter consumption will decrease by one quarter during the next five years.

I hope that the most recent activity of the European Commission—it banned imported apples so that housewives had less choice—will get across to the Government the fact that we must ensure that the housewife can buy what she wants, not just what the Common Market has in surplus.

Bearing in mind New Zealand's problems, is there anything that we can do about butter dumping? There is talk of what might happen next year, but we know that dumping has been extraordinarily high during the past 12 months—to the extent of butter being dumped at 2·72p per pound, which is outrageous. Can the Government persuade the Council to ensure that housewives can buy what they want and that dumping is reduced?

12.46 am

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): The Minister will take away tonight the united view of the House of Commons. All who have spoken have been supportive of New Zealand. I have found the debate instructive and constructive, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will draw strength from it. When he negotiates in Europe, I hope that he will remember the message that my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) delivered: that he should fight the case for New Zealand. I am sure that he will have the good will and support of the House when he does that.

I am glad that all hon. Members who have been rising in their places have been called. The case was put admirably by the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body), who brings a distinctive view to these matters. He was supported with great authority by the hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). If he were present, I would take issue with my hon. Friend as he made a passing reference to the Minister's predecessor but one. He did the Minister a disservice when he compared him unfavourably with the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker). In previous debates, we have all omitted to observe that, 12 months before milk quotas were introduced, the right hon. Gentleman was stamping round the country telling farmers to produce. If I were offered a choice between the present Minister and the right hon. Member for Worcester, I would settle for them both remaining in their present jobs.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) did the House a service by drawing attention to the fact that the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) had not bothered to read the answer to his parliamentary question, tabled earlier this year. I should like to correct the hon. Member for Tatton, as 26 per cent., not 27 per cent., of the United Kingdom butter market is taken by New Zealand imports. That is the 1987 figure, not the rather dated one that the hon. Gentleman used. I am sure that he will update his records and use the former figure in future.

The hon. Member for Tatton did New Zealand a disservice when he mentioned our opposition to imported coal. Our opposition is not to imported coal per se, but to imported coal that is produced under slave labour conditions in South Africa. To attempt to draw a comparison—as the hon. Gentleman did—between the dairy industry in New Zealand and the coal mining industry operating under slave labour conditions in South Africa does a grave disservice to the people of New Zealand, who are our historic friends and allies. The case tonight has been overwhelming. Imports of New Zealand butter provide consumer choice. It is a wholesome product, and is sold at a competitive price. It is part of a trade relationship that is best described by a statement by the New Zealand high commissioner earlier this year:

> "The visible and invisible trade in each direction is now worth nearly £1 billion a year—though Britain still earns rather more from New Zealand than New Zealand does from Britain. . . . The remitted profits of British investment in New Zealand alone exceed the receipts from New Zealand's dairy export to Britain."

The Labour party supports our historic and traditional relationship with New Zealand. In the light of arguments such as the one that I have just quoted, I fail to see how a Conservative House of Commons can do other than support these proposals.

12.50 am

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson): The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) started, as he ended, by saying that the House supported these proposals. Brevity will mean no discourtesy, as I have only four minutes in which to reply to the debate.

So that the record need not be changed, let me correct my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), who quoted figures per year, giving a total of 23 per cent., not in toto. That is just to keep that part of the record straight. Those who read *Hansard* will understand that.

I must start by reminding the House that this agreement must find unanimity in Brussels—and it will be a difficult unanimity to find. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) will not mind my saying that he is an old hand at this game. He highlighted the difficulties of France and Ireland. I repeat that unanimity will be difficult to find. I should like to start where my right hon. Friend ended by saying that the Government believe that the Commission's proposals represent a reasonable balance between the many interests involved.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) made the point, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body), that it is not the Government who buy butter. It is the housewife who does that. The hon. Member for South Shields fully supported advertising, which is unusual for the Opposition. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston, the hon. Gentleman spoke about the value of generic advertising. He also emphasised that the Labour party wanted to fight for the New Zealanders. The hon. Member for Caerphilly also made that point.

In his delightful speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston pointed out the difficulties that New Zealanders have faced in finding other markets. However, despite those difficulties—I do not quarrel at this late hour with his specific examples—they have found other markets. My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon will discover that Anchor butter will find other markets, that New Zealanders will continue to find markets abroad to meet their requirements and that they will continue to sell their butter here.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) was not fair to my right hon. Friend the Minister.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) should read the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), because it encapsulated many things that needed to be said. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) was gracious enough to mention that speech. I assure him that the matter will be renegotiated and that we will again discuss the matter in the House. He spoke

[Mr. Donald Thompson]

specifically about 1992. The Community decision on the future level of New Zealand imports took into account a wide range of often conflicting factors.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), to put the Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings.*

Question, That the amendment be made *put and negatived.*

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 8961/88 on New Zealand butter and of the Government's intention to pursue agreement to these proposals which meet the aim of establishing arrangements for the continued access of New Zealand butter on special terms for the period 1989-92 in a way which represents a reasonable balance between the interests of those involved.

PETITIONS

Settle-Carlisle Railway

12.55 am

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): It has been a long night, but I have been very willing to stay here until nearly 1 o'clock to present this petition on behalf of 2,000 people, many of them my constituents, to preserve the Settle-Carlisle railway as part of the national network.

As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Transport Users Consultative Committee is sending reports to the Minister, and British Rail has produced new figures to show that revenue on passenger traffic on the line has increased from £1 million to £1·7 million. Examination of the Ribblehead viaduct has demonstrated that the repair costs will be halved from the £5 million that British Rail claimed. The course is set fair for the retention of this beautiful railway which is useful not only for scenic visits by tourists but also as an important lifeline for people who live in the area.

I hope that, when the Minister sees on the Order Paper the 29 petitions with more than 80,000 signatures that were presented this week, he will recognise the strength of opinion about keeping this excellent lifeline, link, main-line route and beautiful engineering achievement as part of the national network. It gives me great pleasure to read the petition. It says:

> To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.
>
> The Humble petition of the supporters of the Settle to Carlisle railway sheweth that the outstandingly beautiful and historic Settle-Carlisle railway provides an essential transport system for the people who live in the area; for people wishing to visit the area; for people travelling between the Midlands, Yorkshire and Scotland; for British Rail as a diversionary route; for British Rail to use as a potentially important freight route; and for hundreds of thousands of people who wish to enjoy the scenery near the line and the engineering heritage of the line itself.
>
> Wherefore your petitioners pray that the Settle-Carlisle railway and the associated Blackburn-Hellifield railway, will be retained as an integral part of the national railway network.

And so say all of us.

To lie upon the Table.

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I have your guidance? I too came with a petition in the same terms as that presented by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). I took the liberty of putting it in the bag to make sure that it reached the appropriate place as speedily as possible. I hope that I am in order when I say that I wholeheartedly support the petition and the hundreds of people who have signed it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is out of order. He has put his petition in the bag but he cannot present it without giving notice.

12·58 am

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I wish to present a petition in the name of Mr. Robin Stewart Smith, 3 St Mary's drive, Edwinstowe and 1,000 other signatories in support of the retention of the Settle-Carlisle railway line.

The history of Sherwood forest is legendary, and my constituents share the views of the local people and others nationwide who want to protect this line for future generations. Like the petitioners, I hope that the railway line can be saved, and will join Sherwood forest as part of our famous heritage.

To lie upon the Table.

Council House Sales (Torbay)

1 am

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I wish to present a petition signed by more than half the council tenants of Torbay council—2,634 people—who are horrified by the undemocratic decision of the councillors to sell off their homes, despite an overwhelming vote against such a move by the tenants. The tenants point out:

> "after a vote of all Council tenants monitored by the Electoral Reform Society and where a majority of three to one tenants elected against the sale of their houses to a private landlord, the Torbay Borough Council chose to ignore that majority by inclusion of abstentions and non-voters as signifying acceptance."

This petition is signed by more than half the tenants because they want the House to be aware of the wishes of the majority. The petition ends:

> Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to (1) accept the straight majority vote, as is traditional in this land, and (2) maintain the Council's Housing Stock in the hands of the Torbay Borough Council as is the wish of the majority of tenants.

To lie upon the Table.

Settle-Carlisle Railway

1.1 am

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I present a second petition, which is signed by 2,771 people, who are horrified by the plans to sell off or close the Settle to Carlisle railway. The petitioners and I believe that this outstandingly beautiful and historic line provides an essential local transport link for the people who live there and for the people who are visiting the area. The livelihoods of some people depend upon it, and it is an essential and under-developed part of this nation's rail network. The finances are increasingly showing the viability of this railway line. The petition ends:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the Settle-Carlisle railway, and the associated Blackburn-Hellifield railway, will be retained as an integral part of the national railway network.

To lie upon the Table.

1.2 am

Mr. Garry Waller (Keighley): I wish to present a petition on behalf of 4,000 people living in or near the Keighley constituency, which calls for the retention of the Settle-Carlisle railway. The signatories of the petition, with whom I strongly identify, believe that it is vital that the line should be retained for generations to come. I am proud to be a vice-president of the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line Association. Whether the future of the railway lies in the private or the public sector, we would not easily be forgiven if we allowed the commission of that act of vandalism that closure would constitute. The petition ends:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the Settle-Carlisle railway, and the associated Blackburn-Hellifield railway, will be retained as an integral part of the railway network.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

1.3 am

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I have two petitions to present. The first has over 1,000 signatures of supporters of the Settle-Carlisle railway. The fact that so many people in my constituency have signed the petition shows how important this railway is as part of a national rail network. These petitioners are calling for the Settle-Carlisle line to remain part of the network. It is a particularly beautiful railway, and is used and admired by many people from all parts of the country. It is because of that that many people want to see that line remain as a functioning part of the rail network, and of our public transport system.

To lie upon the Table.

Seals

1.4 am

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The second petition I wish to present is from the children of the Rochdale road junior school, and has over 150 names. They have signed a petition to show their concern about the fate of the seals in the North sea. It is a matter of great pride to me that the children of a school should show so much concern, and such organisation to send in this petition, signed by them and the staff of the school. The petition is a great credit to the children, and it is creditable that they have this concern about the environment, and that they know how to organise themselves and express themselves to the House, which has the ultimate power to do something about the matter.

The petition states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom and Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The humble Petition of the children of Rochdale Road Junior School, Scunthorpe in the constituency of Glanford and Scunthorpe, showeth that they are greatly concerned about the virus that has been decimating the seal population of the North Sea, particularly along the coast of the United Kingdom.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the government to do all in its power to support research and provide resources to combat this virus and protect the seals.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray &c.

To lie upon the Table.

RAF Upper Heyford

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

1.5 am

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): I am grateful, even at this late hour, for the opportunity to raise an important issue so early in this Session of Parliament. I refer to the problem of noise levels at RAF Upper Heyford.

There has been an airfield at Upper Heyford since the late 1920s. For some time now it has been a major NATO air base. F111 aircraft have been based there since 1970 and their numbers were significantly increased by deployment of an additional squadron of EF111s in 1984. Local people have always recognised the contribution that the base may make to Britain's defences and acknowledge that the first duty of the realm is the defence of the realm. However, that public duty has to be balanced against the collective private interests and considerations of hundreds of people living in the proximity of the base.

RAF Upper Heyford lies in the Cherwell valley. The airfield has one physical runway which is aligned roughly on an east-west axis. To the west, literally at the end of the runway, lies the village of Upper Heyford with an adult population of about 1,750 people. A little further away, on the valley ridge, lies Steeple Aston with a population of approximately 860 and Middle Aston with a population of just over 100. At the other end of the runway, again right against the perimeter fence, lies the village of Ardley with a population of about 670. In total, about 2,400 adults and their children live very close to the base. There can be no airfield in Britain or, I suspect, in NATO where so many people and so many villages are so close to an airfield runway and so vulnerable to aircraft noise.

During the late 1960s, there was a substantial increase in aircraft activity at RAF Upper Heyford and thus an increase in aircraft noise. That led in turn to an increase in very real concern among local people that aircraft noise was making their lives intolerable. A survey carried out by some pupils at Bicester school in 1969 and 1970 stated:

"the chairman of Steeple Aston Parish Council told us that the council had done everything possible, but with very little in the way of actual results. They have written to the Base Commander, attended many meetings at the Base, as well as writing to the Ministry of Defence (who only referred the letters back to Upper Heyford)."

That sense of frustration in 1970 is undoubtedly experienced perhaps even more deeply today by the parish council and local residents who feel that officials simply are not listening to them.

However, in 1970, the Ministry of Defence realised that something had to be done to try to relieve the burden of aircraft noise on local people. The minutes of Steeple Aston parish council in September 1970 state:

"In an endeavour to alleviate the noise, aircraft taking off from Upper Heyford were now instructed to turn 10 deg right as soon as possible after take-off. If it were possible with the compatibility of safety, it may be possible to turn more than 10 deg."

That was 1970. Following further public concern, these informal arrangements later became more formal.

Early in 1974, the United States air force experimented with and finally adopted a formal noise abatement flight pattern for departures to the west. The procedure involved a right turn before the aircraft had left the confines of the airfield to avoid Upper Heyford village, following a line slightly to the north of Middle Aston and culminating in a left turn to avoid direct overflight of Duns Tew.

In 1984, as the result of suggestions from a civil airline pilot who lived in Ardley, basically a similar procedure was adopted for departures to the east of the base to avoid Ardley. Despite these noise abatement measures, there was still considerable aircraft noise. In fairness, however, householders in the worst affected villages qualified for noise insulation grants. From time to time there were complaints about aircraft straying from what were regarded as agreed flight paths, but the noise levels were at least tolerable.

What for a number of years had at least been tolerable levels of aircraft noise became intolerable in June of this year. On 24 May, the United States air force announced to local people that both noise abatement departure routes would cease to be used from 1 June. From then on planes would take off in a straight line and fly direct over the villages. That means that to the west of the base they fly directly over Upper Heyford and Steeple Aston. To the east, jets fly directly over Ardley. The official reason for such change was that over the years the F-111 aircraft have become heavier and the planes' thrust has remained the same. Thus, on the ground of safety it had become necessary to straighten the flight paths. The consequence of the change was that the levels of aircraft noise were no longer tolerable. Instead, they became intolerable.

My hon. Friend the Minister came to RAF Upper Heyford to learn more about the situation for himself. In consequence, the United States air force was asked, during the latter part of the summer, to experiment with flying slightly different flight patterns over the area to ascertain whether any improvement could be made. Simultaneously with these experiments, noise tests were carried out by the RAF institute of community health and the Cherwell district council, the council being the environmental health authority.

A combination of these experimental flight patterns and extensive noise tests have led in due course to a slightly modified flight pattern. The results of the tests to the west of the base have now been published. They show that, while there has been a slight reduction in noise levels in the southern end of Steeple Aston, the modified flight paths have meant a substantial increase in noise for Middle Aston. Much of Steeple Aston and Middle Aston now lie within a 78 dBA contour. Amazingly, the noise tests by the RAF institute of community health in the Ardley area, to the east of the base, have not yet been completed. However, there is every reason to believe that, given the results that have been obtained by Cherwell district council and a straightforward extrapolation of the noise footprint elsewhere, a substantial part of Ardley will now come within the 83 dBA contour.

What do the figures mean? I can inform the House that 70 dBA is the level at which the Ministry of Defence pays for houses to have noise insulation grants. So there is a clear public recognition that any household that has continually to endure those levels of noise merits some compensation and the ability to have its home insulated. I am concerned about substantially greater noise levels. There is not time in this debate to discuss in detail the way in which noise is measured, but it is important to remember that it is a logarithmic scale, not a linear progression.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment recently refused a planning appeal in the Cherwell valley because the background noise was 73 dBA. The local district council recently took enforcement proceedings against a factory in a nearby built-up area where noise levels were in in the mid 60s dBA. By contrast, many local people are expected to live with noise levels of 77 dBA and 78 dBA and more. That is somewhat akin to the count of a tube train reaching peak speed and crossing line junctions. We should remember that the report from the RAF institute of community health produced average readings. Contained within them are some very hig spot readings. Individual planes passing close over people's homes cause real physical pain and distress.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has received many letters from local people which set out very clearly the depth of discomfort that they now experience. Nor should we forget that, in consequence of the change in the flight path, Dr. Radcliffe's school at Steeple Aston is now immediately below the flight path. As the Bishop of Oxford, in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, said, the school is

> "now suffering intolerable noise levels."

If, as expected, the noise levels in Ardley are in excess of 83 dBA, the MOD will be obliged to offer to purchase all the houses—an Oxfordshire village. To the west of the base 13 properties in Upper Heyford are clearly within the 83 dBA contour and I understand that the Secretary of State for Defence will be offering to purchase those homes in due course.

People do not want their homes bought; they want quieter homes. There has been a village at Ardley since before the Norman conquest, and villagers do not want the village to be purchased. They simply want to see a substantial amelioration in the present noise levels or, as posters in the village now claim, they want "church bells, not decibels."

Many people experience intolerable levels of noise, and relief must be found. That relief can only come from the MOD. As it is an MOD air base, private individuals have no relief to abate the nuisance in the courts, and the local environmental health authority has no statutory powers to make the nuisance cease. However, let there be no doubt that, had this been a factory or anything other than an installation exempt by statute, local people could have obtained relief by an injunction in the courts and the local environmental health authority would certainly have sought to abate the nuisance by enforcement procedures.

There is a simple constitutional point. The RAF and the United States air force are answerable to Ministers and Ministers are answerable and accountable to the House. My hon. Friend the Minister will have seen that 75 right hon. and hon. Members have signed early-day motion 22. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend and colleague and neighbour the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) for sponsoring that motion. The most recent signature to that motion is that of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) who is in the Chamber tonight. Early-day motion 22 urges the MOD to investigate without delay measures to relieve substantially aircraft noise, including the possible realignment of the runway.

This issue will not go away until a solution is found. Since early-day motion 22 was tabled, I have been encouraged by the sizeable number of right hon. and hon. Members who have expressed their support for speedy action. My hon. Friend the Minister will doubtless tell the House that realigning the runway is a very expensive option. I understand that he estimates that that would cost more than £50 million. If the Ministry feels that in the totality of its budget that is too expensive, the burden of responsibility is on the Minister to come up with a workable and cost-effective solution.

The MOD has the technical expertise and knowledge. Tonight the House wants to know what the MOD is doing to find a solution. The status quo is clearly not sustainable, and changes need to be made without delay.

On television, my hon. Friend said that he

> ". . . will want to see over time what effect this really does have on the local villages."

I do not believe that there can be any doubt whatsoever about the effect of the changes of flight path on local people and local villages. The effect is devastating. No more time is needed to confirm that. It will be no good for my hon. Friend simply to hold out the vague hope of some uncertain solution at some unspecified date in the future. People living in the proximity of Upper Heyford want to know today what action the Ministry of Defence intends to take to resolve the problem.

Finally, I express this caution to my hon. Friend. Local people have been very patient. Six months have passed since the change in flight paths was introduced. They have placed their trust in the parliamentary system. If that system does not produce a result, they will feel increasingly antipathetic towards their American neighbours, and in time, I fear, increasingly hostile to their presence. I am sure that my hon. Friend and the United States air force realise that it would be a matter of real concern if the base were to exhaust local support. Thus, I hope that this evening we shall start to hear of some real solutions.

1.21 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Roger Freeman): My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) has presented the problem with characteristic clarity. I am aware of the considerable concern of those who live in his constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), which is also affected. I am well aware, through reports in the media and correspondence received from my hon. Friends and from members of the public, of the very deep concerns that they have, and, I understand them.

The problems of Upper Heyford as a military airfield, and the problems of noise associated with military aircraft, are not unique. I regret that there are no simple solutions. I hope that I shall be able to convey to the House my concern and that of the Ministry of Defence, and outline one or two positive constructive steps that we plan to take.

The history of RAF Upper Heyford began during world war 1, when the base was used for training purposes. During world war 2, Upper Heyford again played a training role at first, eventually becoming a Royal Air Force bomber station in 1943. In 1969 it was announced that the base would become home to the 20th Tactical Figher Wing of the USAF which was to be re-equipped with the F-111E swing-wing fighter bomber. A large modernisation and construction programme was carried out at the base to enable it to accommodate the F-111E, and the first aircraft of the planned three squadrons arrived in September 1970. The three squadrons of F-111Es were joined in 1983 by one squadron of the EF-111A—electronic counter-measures support aircraft.

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

Those aircraft provide long-range, all-weather tactical fighter bomber and electronic combat sorties for NATO and are a vital part of the Alliance's range of deterrent forces.

The United States air force presence at Upper Heyford therefore goes back more than 30 years, and during that time the base has received the support and the hospitality of the local community. I am very grateful for that support, which continues to this day, despite the current problems, and I know that this gratitude is shared by the United States air force. The base has worked hard to reciprocate that support. One of the ways in which it has done so was the introduction in 1976, as my hon. Friend said, in response to representations from the local community about aircraft noise, of a noise abatement take-off pattern for aircraft departing to the west. That manoeuvre involved the aircraft making a steep banking turn to the right immediately on take-off, followed very shortly by another turn to the left. That procedure aimed successfully, to reduce the noise levels experienced by villages near the end of the runway. In 1984 a noise-abatement pattern was introduced for aircraft departing to the east, with the same aim. However, the F-111 is undoubtedly a noisy aeroplane, and noise levels around the base were still high. Consequently, in 1986, following a noise survey by the RAF's institute of community and occupational medicine, a noise compensation scheme was introduced. That provided for those homes within the 12-hour average 70 dBA noise contour to be given grants for noise insulation work and for the Ministry to purchase homes within the 83 dBA noise contour, of which there was only one at that time.

Our prime responsibility towards the communities around the base is to ensure that the flying activities there are carried out as safely as possible. To that end, the safety of flying operations at the base, as elsewhere, is kept under constant review. That process led the United States air force to the conclusion, earlier this year, that changes in the thrust-to-weight ratio of the F-111E since the noise abatement patterns were introduced had led to an erosion of the safety margins for those patterns to an unacceptable, though not currently dangerous, degree. Typically, an F-111E on an operational sortie is some 6 per cent. heavier now than it would have been 10 years ago, consequently reducing the thrust-to-weight ratio, while there has been an associated increase in the drag factor. Those changes did not occur all at once, but step-by-step over the 10-year period.

Bearing in mind its responsibilities for those over whom it flies as well as the safety of the aircrew themselves, the United States air force prudently requested that it be allowed to revert to the standard direct take-off employed at other military airbases, and, indeed, as previously used at Upper Heyford. I endorsed that request and the changes in take-off patterns were made with effect from 1 June this year.

We expected that the changes would increase noise levels in several of the villages around the base, notably Steeple Aston and Ardley, but we took into account the fact that Steeple Aston had lived with the straight-ahead pattern from 1970 to 1976, while Ardley had done so from 1970 to 1984, although neither village could be expected to welcome a return to the earlier patterns. In addition, when visibility was bad the aircraft had in any case generally used the straight-ahead pattern directly over Steeple Aston or Ardley. I commissioned a full noise survey by scientists of the RAF's institute of community and occupational medicine for this autumn, taking account of the changes to which I have already referred. I also arranged for my officials and officers at the base to brief locally elected representatives of the communities likely to be affected —and indeed my hon. Friend—before the changes took place.

In the event, it became clear that the increased noise levels had given rise to considerable local concern especially in respect of the Dr. Ratcliffe school in Steeple Aston. I accept that they also affect other residents. Those concerns were ably and forcefully represented by my hon. Friend and, as a result, I visited RAF Upper Heyford and Steeple Aston soon after the change in take-off patterns to assess the situation for myself. During my visit I announced that I had decided to take three steps in the light of my hon. Friend's representations: first, that the Ministry of Defence would, in principle, on an exceptional basis, pay for sound insulation work at the Dr. Ratcliffe school in Steeple Aston; secondly, that the United States air force would carry out an evaluation of alternative operating patterns aimed at identifying a means of reducing the noise levels then being experienced by many local people; and, thirdly, that the full noise survey planned for the autumn would be brought forward to this summer. The work on all three of those areas has been pressed forward as swiftly as practicable and I shall outline where we now stand on each.

First, the governors of the Dr. Ratcliffe school have commissioned a firm of consultants, for which the Ministry is paying, to advise them on a suitable noise insulation scheme for the school. We shall pay for the necessary work to be carried out and I hope that it will be possible to begin that during the Christmas holidays.

Secondly, the United States air force tried out a modification whereby the aircraft made a gentle turn to take the aircraft between the villages of Steeple and Middle Aston, coupled with an earlier termination of the aircraft's afterburners. That modified pattern has been employed by the F-111s taking off from the base to the west since mid-August, and the results of the noise survey indicate that it has produced some reduction in the noise level in most of Steeple Aston. For example, the average noise level at the bus stop in the centre of Steeple Aston was 77·5 dBA prior to the introduction of the modified take-off path, and 72·3 subsequently. It has also reduced noise levels in Lower Heyford.

The modified take-off pattern has a further advantage. The old noise abatement pattern could not be flown in bad weather and so aircraft from the base used to overfly Steeple Aston perhaps as much as 17 per cent. of the time during the winter months. The modified path can be used in bad weather as well as in good, and so aircraft from the base no longer directly overfly the village of Steeple Aston because of bad weather.

Thirdly, the noise survey for the western end of the airfield has now been completed. The work on the eastern end, in which direction there are significantly fewer departures, is not yet complete because there have not been a sufficient number of flying days for correct observations to be taken. We are not delaying matters. The report for the western end of the runway shows that the noise levels in Steeple Aston and Upper Heyford in particular are higher than they were prior to 1 June and recommends the introduction of a revised noise compensation scheme at the base. This revised scheme will include an offer from the Ministry of Defence to purchase 13 properties in Upper Heyford which lie within the 83 dBA 12-hour noise contour.

I am today able to announce a further step which I hope will be welcome to my hon. Friend, although it is not a complete answer, and I shall come on to further planned steps in a moment. As my hon. Friend is aware, in addition to providing noise insulation grants for residents who are subject to average noise levels in excess of 70 dBA, the Ministry of Defence allows claims for injurious affection compensation where there is evidence to show that there has been an adverse effect on the value of residential property and certain small businesses as a direct result of an increase in noise or other physical effects following the bringing into use of new public works at an airfield. I feel sure that my hon. Friend will be pleased to learn that, although strictly speaking there are no new public works, exceptionally my Department will be able to consider claims for injurious affection from those concerned. I shall announce full details when the revised noise compensation scheme at RAF Upper Heyford is introduced.

My hon. Friend especially mentioned the possibility of realigning the runway at RAF Upper Heyford as a possible solution to the remaining problems. I am aware that I have been talking principally about noise compensation schemes and not, as my hon. Friend said, tackling the fundamental problems. I have to say that there are significant difficulties with this proposal, not least of which is that realigning the runway so that aircraft no longer take-off toward Steeple and Middle Aston can only serve to create problems elsewhere. Although, perhaps, not as severe, they will none the less be unwelcome to the people they affect.

Such a project would also be extremely costly, because it would involve the demolition and reprovision of expensive support facilities, as well as simply building a new runway. In addition, there would be operational problems caused by the disruption of moving the aircraft to another base while the work was done; and, indeed, the problem of finding another base at which to put them and the large numbers of associated personnel. However, I can tell my hon. Friend that we will, as he asked, carry out a full study of the costs and implications of realigning the runway. We will make the results public and I shall write to my hon. Friend when the work is complete.

When I visited Upper Heyford some months ago to see and hear for myself the problems involving military aircraft, I promised that I would return to the base once the full study had been completed, and I hope that it will be completed not only comprehensively but quickly. I shall then meet my hon. Friend and his constituents to explain the results of the study and to explore what further steps can be taken.

Mr. Baldry: May I make it clear to my hon. Friend that, while, of course, I am grateful for the fact that he will carry out a full technical survey of the feasibility of realigning the runway, he has made it clear on a number of occasions that there is a cost involved, and he has made it clear publicly that he is worried about that and the technical feasibility of it. However, can one understand that the Ministry of Defence will consider other technical options? The Ministry clearly knows the capabilities of these planes, and it should not just be a question of considering whether it is possible to realign the runway. Other options that may be available to relieve aircraft noise in this area should also be considered.

Mr. Freeman: I give my hon. Friend that assurance. Our minds are certainly not closed. We are sympathetic to the problems. As I said at the outset, there are no simple solutions. If there were, we would have taken them. Certainly my mind is open, and we shall continue to explore with the United States air force and with our own experts possible solutions to the problem.

To sum up, I very much regret that the change of take-off patterns at RAF Upper Heyford this summer has led to an increase in the levels of disturbance experienced by many of those who live in the vicinity of the airfield. I apologise to those who have experienced distress because of this disturbance. However, I have to say that the changes were necessary because of the need to maximise the safety of flying operations from the base. As such, the changes were in the interests of all concerned, the local community as well as the aircrew, since I believe that one point on which we would all agree is the need to do our utmost to reduce the chances of an accident.

I hope that I have shown that the concerns that my hon. Friend has so ably presented on behalf of his constituents have been taken very seriously by the Ministry of Defence, by myself and by the US air force, and that we have responded, and will continue to respond, in a constructive and helpful way.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commmons

Thursday 1 December 1988

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF GLASGOW DISTRICT COUNCIL ORDER CONFIRMATION

Mr. Secretary Rifkind presented a Bill, under section 7 of the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936 to confirm a Provisional Order relating to City of Glasgow District Council; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be considered upon Wednesday 7 December and to be printed. [Bill 11.]

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Surpluses

1. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress that has been made in eliminating agricultural surpluses within the European Community.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): European Community intervention stocks of most commodities have fallen significantly as a result of recent common agricultural policy reforms. For example, butter stocks have been reduced by 80 per cent. over the past year and stocks of skimmed milk powder are now almost negligible.

Mr. Baldry: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that the United Kingdom butter mountain is melting and that skimmed milk powder surpluses have almost vanished proves that CAP reforms are beginning to work and that it is possible to reform the CAP in such a way as to provide a firm basis for the future prosperity of our farmers?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend. A main criticism of the CAP in recent years has been the amount of money that has gone into the storage and disposal of surplus stocks. The fact that those surplus stocks are decreasing substantially is a good sign for the future stability of our farmers. We must do other things to achieve complete CAP reform, but we should acknowledge how much has been done already.

Mr. Tony Banks: I understand that we have a large and growing cheese mountain as a result of EC surpluses. Of course, we expect to get nothing but hard cheese from the Government—*[Interruption.]* It will do for 2.36 pm. As I assume that some of that cheese will be in intervention stores in my constituency—there is probably some good Greek feta cheese knocking about—is there any chance of the pensioners of Newham eating some of that feta cheese, with a pint or two of ouzo, at Christmas?

Mr. MacGregor: That was a rather belaboured remark. It is important to get the matter in context. The increase in cheese stocks is small, as is the total stock. The major expense lay in the butter mountain stocks, and they have been decreasing. As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, we took advantage of the EC free food scheme in relation to butter, but the decrease in butter stocks means that we shall have much less, or nothing, to do on that front in the future. That is not the best way to deal with the surplus. The best way is not to have a surplus in the first place.

Mr. Marland: As the agricultural surpluses are coming under control, will my right hon. Friend consider easing the co-responsibility levies on dairy products and cereals? They have always been iniquitous taxes and have had no effect on surpluses. Will he use his best offices to reduce that tax?

Mr. MacGregor: It is right to emphasise the fact that surpluses are decreasing and the mountains vanishing. The public at large and many pundits have not yet got hold of that fact. But we must still undertake further reforms, not least in the subsidised disposal of dairy products that are not in intervention stores. With other factors, that means that the dairy sector is still an expensive regime.

I agree with my hon. Friend that the co-responsibility levies on milk and cereals are the wrong way to tackle the problem, and I shall continue to battle to get rid of them. But the regimes are still expensive, and until we get them more under control I may be unable to persuade all my fellow Council Ministers to accept my view.

Dr. David Clark: Will the Minister confirm that it has cost the European taxpayer £4·5 billion to remove the post-1987 food mountain and thus reduce the amount in storage? Will he assure the House that, to stop those mountains being rebuilt, not even one quarter of that amount has been spent in 1988?

Mr. MacGregor: It is rather complicated to give exact figures on what it costs to get rid of surplus products, as costs are spread over several years. Perhaps I can write to the hon. Gentleman about that. He is right to say that the figure has been high for storage and disposal of stocks. Last year, the actual figure for the Community was £12·5 billion. It is important that we ensure that stocks do not increase again and that we do not face such costs. That is what the thrust of the policies is about.

3

Mr. Paice: Does my right hon. Friend agree that cereal farmers have taken an almighty beating in the cereal price that they received as part of the effort to reform the CAP and reduce surpluses? There has been a 42 per cent. reduction in their prices in the past 10 years. Would he say to cereal farmers in his and my constituencies that he understands their problems and that he will do everything that he can to ensure that they do not lead to widespread deprivation of vast areas of East Anglia?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend. I understand entirely the difficulties that many cereal farmers in this country are experiencing as a result of the adjustment process that we have had to undertake, coupled also with two years of bad weather in East Anglia, which has certainly exacerbated our difficulties.

I do not wish to minimise the matter; I entirely understand the pressures. However, my hon. Friend will agree that there was no stable basis for our cereal farmers as worldwide and Community surpluses went on rising, at ever-increasing cost to the taxpayer. The best guarantee of a prosperous future is to tackle the problem of the surpluses, and taking marginal cereal land out of production helps with that, which is, of course, the purpose of the set-aside scheme.

Hedgerows

2. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make a statement with regard to the destruction of countryside hedgerows during the last five years.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Richard Ryder): There have been hedgerow removals in recent years as a result of changing agricultural circumstances and development such as road schemes and housing. There are no clear details on the extent of those removals.

Countryside hedgerows provide a wide variety of benefits to the environment and agriculture. I am very keen to discourage their removal or deterioration. Their value depends on positive action and sympathetic management to keep them in good condition. My Department provides capital grants at favourable rates for the laying of hedges and planting of new ones, as well as advice to farmers on hedgerow management.

Mr. Hardy: Can the Minister deny that, since the Government blocked my perfectly sensible and responsible Hedgerows Bill five years ago, thousands of miles of hedgerows, much of them established and important, have been destroyed? In view of the Prime Minister's recent pronouncements on the importance and attractiveness of the British hedgerow, may I take it that when I again present the Bill next month the Government will take a different view?

Mr. Ryder: I do not believe that legislation in this sphere would be effective, because it cannot be properly policed. Nevertheless, because I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said on the subject over many years, and because, during the past month, I have twice met representatives of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, of which the hon. Gentleman is a member, to discuss the issue, I would be more than happy to talk to him if we could get together in my office during the next week or two.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I was extremely glad to hear what my hon. Friend had to say about the Government's attitude to hedgerows. He knows the importance of hedgerows for wildlife, ranging from hares to partridges, to small birds and butterflies. I am not convinced that, as it exists at present, the grant system is adequate to persuade people to put in more hedgerows. Particularly in the light of the set-aside proposals, will he review the grant system and see whether something can be done to improve it?

Mr. Ryder: Only last Monday my right hon. Friend the Minister announced a new scheme—the farm and conservation grant scheme which increases hedgerow grants from 30 to 40 per cent. in lowland areas, where losses have been the most severe. I urge as many farmers as possible to take advantage of the scheme.

Marine Mammals

3. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has recently held discussions with fishermen's organisations regarding the phenomenon of the incidental capture of marine mammals.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson): My Department has developed plans to seek the co-operation of fishermen to monitor more closely the extent of incidental capture of marine mammals and will be in touch with fishermen's organisations.

Mr. McAllion: Unlike Scottish Tories, grey seals are an endangered species about which the people of Scotland really care. I was pleased to hear the Minister say that he agrees that everything possible should be done to try to control the activities that threaten the remaining seal population off our shores. When he meets representatives of the fishermen's organisations, will he ensure that the representatives of the appropriate scientific groups are also there, and that practical solutions to remove this threat from the seal population around our shores are found?

Mr. Thompson: It would be no good meeting fishermen's group unless both we and they were properly backed, or we would not reach any commonsense arrangement. This problem is greater in the Pacific, where the mammals swim along with the tuna, than it is in the North sea. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman and I should visit the Pacific to see what is being done there.

Mr. Ian Bruce: What is happening about the checking of other vessels off our shores, and particularly in the taking of catches that are not allowed by law? We have good policing arrangements in force when our fishermen dock into our ports, but what are we doing to ensure that these regulations are properly policed within our territorial waters?

Mr. Thompson: I will stick at this point on marine mammals. The Wildlife Link umbrella group will be as influential in other countries as it is in this, and I am sure that fishermen in other countries see this as great a problem there as it is here, and will be making their own arrangements.

Dr. Godman: Given that cetacea of all kinds are now covered by schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, can the Minister assure the House that he will advise fishermen that they need not fear prosecution if they report any such incidental catches?

Mr. Thompson: As the hon. Gentleman says, all whales and dolphins are given a general protection in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 against being caught. However, a fisherman accidentally taking a protected animal would not be held liable, assuming that he acts in a reasonable manner. This will be made clear to fishermen so that they can be reassured about reporting information for our monitoring scheme.

Bovine Somatotropin

4. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has discussed the use of bovine somatotropin for boosting milk production with representatives of the Womens Farming Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I am well aware of the views of Womens Farming Union members on this subject, which I discussed with them last week.

Mrs. Golding: Is the Minister aware of the concern of all women about the use of BST? Is he aware that in America there are many adverse views about the use of it and about the effect that it may have on young children? Will he discuss with all farming unions, before he grants a licence, the adverse effects that it could have on the farming industry?

Mr. MacGregor: I have discussed this subject with all farming unions, and there are varying views within the unions, including within the Womens Farming Union. It is important to reassure women by saying that before the trials were approved safety was carefully assessed by the Veterinary Products Committee, as it has to be under the Medicines Act 1968. That Act lays down the criteria that it has to apply. The committee consists of experts in human and animal health and it advised that there was no risk to consumers arising from the trials. That is an important point, and the same processes would have to be followed if there were an application for a licence. It is also the case that many countries, including the United States, are allowing these trials because they too have been advised that there is no risk to human health. That is an important point to make clear to consumers.

Mr. Latham: In view of the traumas that we have had over milk quotas in the past few years, why are we talking about boosting milk production by artificial means?

Mr. MacGregor: We must be careful to distinguish several factors. Under the Medicines Act, when there is any application for a new scientific development, we have to ensure that it is assessed by the experts on safety, efficacy and quality. Safety is paramount, and that is what we have to be sure about. But one has to be careful about saying that one should inhibit new agricultural development simply because we have a surplus. I am anxious that our industry should remain highly competitive and able to take advantage of all legitimate technological developments. Otherwise, it will become uncompetitive. As to surpluses, we have a milk quota system that guarantees that we shall not have an increase in milk production as a result of the application of BST. The point about not disadvantaging our industry or research effort by banning products that are safe is important.

Mr. Geraint Howells: Will the Minister prevent the Milk Marketing Board from selling milk for human consumption from the trial cows until the findings are known?

Mr. MacGregor: Under the Medicines Act, I have no powers to stop something if the Veterinary Products Committee guarantees that it is safe, efficacious and of quality. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it would be extremely difficult in practice to do that. We should emphasise the fact that there is no scientific evidence of risk to human health.

Mr. Churchill: Is it not time that the consumer was given the protection of the right to know precisely what is in the pint that he drinks? Is it not time that there was a proper requirement for labelling when such additives, hormones and other products are used to boost milk production?

Mr. MacGregor: It is important that the consumer should know that, according to all our expert advice, there is no risk to human health. In any case, the hormone is already present in the milk produced.

I am keen to ensure that more informative labelling is available to consumers wherever possible. There are practical problems with the Milk Marketing Board with regard to this product, but I am willing to consider all possibilities for improving the information available to consumers.

Mr. Ron Davies: Does the Minister recognise, from the questions that have been put to him this afternoon and from motions on the Order Paper, that there is outright opposition, both inside and outside the House, to the proposed introduction of BST? This afternoon the Minister has taken refuge behind the Medicines Act. Does he accept that if the Medicines Act is not an adequate instrument to deal with the threat posed by BST he should review the provisions of that Act? In the interim, will he acknowledge that he has powers to ban BST under the 1968 Act? Will he now give an assurance, before he makes a decision, that he will give full consideration to banning BST, using the powers in the 1968 Act?

Mr. MacGregor: There are a wide variety of views about BST and it is important that they are based on full knowledge. With regards to the animal test certificate under the Medicines Act I have to approve any product if the Veterinary Products Committee assures me that it is safe, efficacious and of quality. As regards issuing a licence for the product, that again would go through that committee and through a European Community committee, so there would be a full process before a decision was made.

There is another important point that I should stress to the House. There is concern about ensuring proper research and development possibilities in this country. If major companies thought that their major investments would be put at risk by changing policy decisions in mid-stream without a good basis for doing so, we would be disadvantaged in this country, because that research and development would go elsewhere. That is another important consideration to be borne in mind.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

5. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates he has for the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy over the next six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: All the evidence available so far suggests that the disease is not spreading from animal to animal, but that the cases identified are attributable to a common source. Our knowledge is still developing and any estimate must be tentative. Based on the incidence since the disease was made notifiable, the number of cases likely to be confirmed over the next six months may be about 350 a month.

Mr. Lloyd: Will the Minister confirm that his Ministry was aware of the widespread belief that "spongy brain" is transmitted from one species to another—from sheep to cattle—and that during that period infected meat was sold for human consumption in the markets because of the lamentable failure of his Ministry to stop it? The Minister should apologise for that. What action will he take to prevent the import of infected meat? There has been no recorded outbreak of the disease outside this country, but that may simply reflect the fact that veterinary practices are not at the same standard as those in Britain.

Mr. Thompson: Far from apologising, I shall say that the response of all concerned with the disease has been exemplary. The Ministry, the farmers and the renderers have acted in concert to attack the disease at its onset. The Ministry has diverted funds to find out exactly where the disease is coming from and has found, as the hon. Gentleman said, that it may have started in sheep and been transmitted through animal feedingstuffs to other animals. Therefore, the rendering industry—renderers make protein for animal feedingstuffs—have withdrawn that protein and we have extended the withdrawal period for another year. The farmers are notifying the disease and have accepted 50 per cent. compensation. The Southwood committee has made recommendations which the Government have implemented immediately.

Mr. Robert Hicks: Is my hon. Friend aware that the incidence of outbreaks of the disease is particularly high in the south-west? Will he consider carefully the existing level of compensation for affected animals? There is, after all, a precedent in the brucellosis eradication scheme, in which the figure was higher than 50 per cent. for infected animals.

Mr. Thompson: I omitted to mention imports in my answer to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd). He said that there are no notifications of the disease anywhere else. We are studying the position carefully. I know, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) knows, that the disease started in the south. Nobody knows why there have been far more incidents in the south-west than in the rest of the country. *[Interruption.]* The south-west would not think its economy was over-heated. Compensation is at about the right level. The animal withers and dies, so is worthless even if the farmer does not notify, although we have no information that farmers are not notifying us of the disease.

Mr. Skinner: Can the Minister say whether there has been any incidence of the disease in Leicestershire, particularly in Blaby? Can he also confirm that if human beings eat large quantities of meat that has been infected by "spongy brain", the disease can be transmitted to them? Could Ministers, who go to large banquets, be infected with the disease, and can he confirm that that is why the Chancellor has tunnel vision?

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman began well. There have been outbreaks of the disease in every county. *[Interruption.]* The disease does not affect meat, therefore neither I nor the Chancellor can be affected by it.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I congratulate my hon. Friend on acting so swiftly and circumspectly to contain the disease within animals—if not on the Opposition Front Bench. Has the Ministry managed to achieve proper incinerating facilities? In the south-west we are concerned about the open burning of the repulsive carcases.

Mr. Thompson: There was open burning of carcases in Cornwall, at Lean quarry, in Peasedown St. John and in Cheriton Bishop in Devon. That has now stopped. We have a perfectly adequate facility in Hertfordshire, where we are collecting carcases and taking them to the incinerator in refrigerated vehicles. That facility is in Royston and will meet our needs for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Heffer: What about heifers?

Dr. David Clark: As the BSE-type disease has jumped species from sheep to cattle and there is some evidence that it has jumped to humans, why is the Ministry withholding cash for vital research work on BSE, which obviously poses a potential threat to public health?

Mr. Thompson: The answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) is that we have found the disease only in female cattle, with one exception, so he had better be careful.

The answer to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) is that there is no evidence that the disease can move from cattle to human beings. Scrapie has been endemic for many years and there is no evidence that it will move from sheep to human beings. We are burning the animals and have banned the milk in order to be doubly safe. We have spent a great deal of money on this disease and its eradication. We may be accused of spending too much, but I am sure that we cannot be accused of spending too little.

Sheepmeat

6. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the sheepmeat regime will next be discussed in the Council of Agriculture Ministers of the European Economic Community.

Mr. MacGregor: I expect the Council to discuss the review of the sheepmeat regime again at its next meeting on 12 December.

Mr. Shepherd: Does my right hon. Friend agree that sheepmeat production is of particular importance to the west of the country, with only uplands to work, and where little else can be done with the ground? Does he agree also that the stabiliser package, as it is currently running, not only ignores imports from eastern Europe and New Zealand, but penalises United Kingdom and European production? Is there not, therefore, a case for seeking a marked reduction in imports from New Zealand under the voluntary restraints agreement below the level of 205,000, which is currently on the table, bearing in mind that at present New Zealand is putting in only about 200,000, yet this works against the interests of United Kingdom producers?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of the sheep sector, not only in the west country uplands, but in uplands throughout the United Kingdom. I am aware of that in the negotiations on which we are embarking. The stabiliser was introduced because of the escalating cost of the sheepmeat regime, now estimated to be more than 1 billion ecu, from a much lower base only a short while ago. The stabiliser was introduced to control that and it relates entirely to increases in flocks in the European Community.

My hon. Friend will know that imports from New Zealand and elsewhere are a major aspect of the review of the regime that we are undertaking. There is a draft agreement with New Zealand. The arrangements with New Zealand are GATT-bound, but we shall have to see how the negotiations go as we proceed with the review. I expect that that will take a long time.

Mr. MacDonald: Is it right that under the stabiliser proposal upland sheep farmers in less-favoured areas may face cuts in premiums because of increases in production on lower ground, particularly as a result of farmers who grow grain moving to sheep production? Can the Minister guarantee that that will not happen? If he cannot, will he look at the case for increasing the hill livestock allowances to compensate?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot give a guarantee that that will not happen because, clearly, stabilisers are introduced in this sector, as in any other where there is a high cost in the regime, in order to control the costs of the regime. It is not possible to distinguish across the Community where the sheep receiving the benefits come from. I am aware of the importance of the sheep sector to the uplands, which is why I excluded grazed fallow from the set-aside scheme. I wanted to ensure that upland farmers were protected from what I would otherwise have seen as unfair competition. I did that because I was strongly aware of the sector's importance to the uplands.

Mr. Ralph Howell: Is my right hon. Friend aware that food prices and agricultural support are at their lowest level for 20 years? Does he realise that depressing agriculture prices is doing vast harm to the industry and to the British economy in general?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that that question is entirely related to the review of the sheepmeat regime, but I should like to say that it is important to ensure long-term stability for our farmers. That is what I have been keen to secure. While we have surpluses and the heavy cost of disposing of them, long-term security is on a fragile basis. I acknowledge the splendid contribution that farmers have made to food production and to keeping food prices down. I agree with my hon. Friend about that. I hope he agrees, however, that we must ensure security for the long term. Getting rid of surpluses and their cost must be part of that.

Common Agricultural Policy

7. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with European Community Agriculture Ministers about reform of the common agricultural policy; and what agreements were reached.

Mr. MacGregor: Discussions are continuing in the Agriculture Council on Commission proposals for reforming the CAP regimes for sheep and beef.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. In his negotiations with the Commission, does he share the view of the deputy director of the agriculture department of the Commission—Mr. Pooley—who said in Clwyd last week that, in his opinion, the common agricultural policy is likely to lead to farms with no sensible income that nobody but farmers would accept? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with that statement?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not entirely sure that I know what that statement means. That farmers would have no sensible income? That they would have lower incomes? If that is what Mr. Pooley said—he has never said it to me —I do not agree with him. We are anxious to secure a good, stable basis for the prosperity of our farmers. In other member states in the Community, I understand that there are a lot of small, non-viable farmers with non-viable incomes—many more than in Britain. That problem will have to be tackled.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: May I refer my right hon. Friend to the future of the sheepmeat regime? Will he give a rather more positive response to the view just expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd)? Does he agree that, since punitive milk quotas were imposed on the United Kingdom, many farming areas have been suitable only for sheep, so the sheepmeat regime is of considerable importance to the United Kingdom? Is it not extraordinary that the CAP does not show where surpluses and the huge additional costs to it that arise because of the increased number of sheep. Will my right hon. Friend consider that in future discussions in the European Community?

Mr. MacGregor: I certainly will. The sheep sector is expanding rather faster here than in many other Community countries. There are very good reasons for that, one of which is that we are good at it. In negotiations on the sheepmeat regime, I am anxious to secure arrangements that allow free but fair competition, provide support at reasonable cost and enable the United Kingdom to capitalise on our natural productive advantages in the sheepmeat sector. That is what I am out to secure, and I believe that it is exactly what our sheep producers want.

I am sure my hon. Friend knows that dairy quotas now have widespread support throughout the British farming community.

Mr. Maclennan: In answer to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd), the Minister sounded more concerned about New Zealand sheep producers that about sheep producers in our own hills and uplands. Why is that his objective?

Mr. MacGregor: That is certainly not the impression I intended to give. I hope that the answer I have just given shows that I am fighting for United Kingdom sheep producers in order to secure the best possible arrangements in the future regime.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) raised a matter of great importance for small farmers throughout the country? Will my right hon. Friend try to direct the energy of his fellow Ministers to reform the common agricultural policy and to protect farmers from partial and unbalanced programmes such as the BBC's "Watchdog", which made unfounded, dangerous and alarming allegations about eggs?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, certainly. For small farmers, we must put the matter in perspective. The thrust of some policies geared towards small farmers being advocated in the Community would not be advantageous to the United Kingdom, because they are directed at the type of small farmer, that we do not have. Those are the unviable farmers, and I am not sure that those policies make sense.

On the issue of salmonella in eggs, it is important that the media put across a balanced view. There have been a small number of outbreaks in relation to total egg consumption per day. There have been 26 outbreaks this year, and 30 million eggs are consumed per day. Therefore, the risks are small. Having said that, we and the industry are determined to ensure that we minimise the risks to the maximum extent possible. We are considering further measures to enable us to do so.

Farmers (Northern Region)

8. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent correspondence he has received from farmers in the northern region.

Mr. Ryder: We receive substantial correspondence from farmers in the northern region on a wide variety of issues.

Mr. Devlin: The Minister will be aware from recent correspondence that, although many farmers in the northern region have had a good harvest, they have not had a good financial year? I ask him, on behalf of the farmers in my region, what advice he has to offer them? Is he asking them to get out of agriculture altogether, should they diversify, or just soldier on regardless?

Mr. Ryder: We shall, as always, be keeping a close watch on information about farm incomes that emerges from the annual review. Work is still being done on the figures. However, it is clear that although there is pressure in some sectors, others, such as the dairy sector and farms in less-favoured areas, both of particular relevance to the north, appear to have had a better year. I am convinced that the policies we are pursuing are the best way to ensure a viable and stable farming industry in the north.

Mr. Home Robertson: Is the Minister aware that the proximity of the northern region to Scotland will be making farmers and farm workers in the north of England aware of the burdens that will result from the imposition of the poll tax on employees whose employers at present pay their rates for them? Will he seek to avoid the distress and difficulties that are presently being created for farm workers in Scotland by immediately asking the English Agricultural Wages Board to take steps to avoid that problem being created for farm workers in England and Wales in a year's time?

Mr. Ryder: I welcome the hon. Gentleman back to the Labour Front Bench. Under the community charge, if an employer wishes to pay the community charge of an employee he is still entitled to do so. It is not for me to interfere with matters that are looked after by the Agricultural Wages Board.

Licensed Victuallers Association

9. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the Licensed Victuallers Association.

Mr. Ryder: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson), met representatives of the National Licensed Victuallers Association on 25 April 1988, in the company of several hon. Members, including the hon. Member, himself.

Mr. Allen: Does the Minister agree that there are now large numbers of people in the brewing industry who own pubs but who are not brewers by trade—they are property developers, speculators and so on? Is he aware that their tenants and publicans are not covered by the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, nor by the voluntary code of practice to which brewers adhere? Will he meet the LVA to discuss how to tackle the problem?

Mr. Ryder: I would be pleased to meet the LVA. There are very few instances such as those raised by the hon. Gentleman, but he is right to draw attention to them. In the case of recent relatively large scale pub sales by one of the major brewers, Grand Metropolitan, to a non-brewer, Heron, the contract of sale required the buying company to respect the provisions of the code, so the tenants continue to enjoy that protection. We would expect similar arrangements to apply to other similar sales. If there are other cases which the hon. Gentleman would wish to draw to my attention, I hope that he will do so.

Mr. Colvin: May I suggest an easy solution to my hon. Friend? That is, to give statutory backing to the brewers' code of practice on tenants' security.

Mr. Ryder: That is a matter for the Brewers' Society in consultation with the LVA, and I am not convinced yet that both those organisations wish to go down the path that has been recommended by my hon. Friend.

Green Pound

10. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in securing a further devaluation of the green pound.

Mr. MacGregor: Following persistent United Kingdom pressure in the price negotiations in July, the green pound will be devalued from 1 January 1989 to reduce monetary compensatory amounts by 3·2 points, except for beef, where devaluations will be considered during the current review of the regime.

Mr. Livsey: I thank the Minister for that answer. I am pleased to hear that there will be a devaluation. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that is not sufficient, with farming incomes at their lowest in real terms since the last war? Will he press for a further devaluation in addition to the one that he has said is on the books?

Mr. MacGregor: Devaluations of the green pound are normally considered in price negotiations. We achieved one of the best deals, with the exception of Greece, where exceptional circumstances applied, in the last negotiations. I have made it clear that I want to see MCAs phased out by 1992. I have succeeded in getting the Community to agree to that. I shall be persisting in that approach.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be departing immediately this afternoon to attend the European Council at Rhodes.

Mr. Bowden: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to repudiate claims so assiduously put about by the Opposition that the failure of the Irish Government to expedite an extradition order in respect of Father Patrick Ryan is due in any way to an error on the part of the Crown Prosecution Service?

The Prime Minister: I understand that very shortly my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General will be dealing with these matters in response to a private notice question, and will deal with them fully. I can deal with them only generally. Any suggestion that the failure to secure Ryan's arrest is attributable to any fault of the CPS is absolutely unwarranted. The fact is that the Irish authorities could have sought a provisional warrant from early last Friday evening onwards. The Irish Attorney-General has been in a position to authorise the backing of the original warrants since they arrived in Dublin early on Saturday. It is now over five days since all the relevant documents were sent to Dublin. No questions have been raised as to the sufficiency of the statements of fact and law, although my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General had told his opposite number that he was immediately available.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister share the view of the Chancellor of the Exchequer that mortgage interest payments should be withdrawn from the retail prices index?

The Prime Minister: I understand that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made it clear that there was no immediate proposal to exclude mortgage interest payments from the RPI. As the right hon. Gentleman is aware, there is an advisory committee which considers any changes to the RPI. The Government's view is well known. We include mortgage interest payments in the retail prices index, which very few other countries do. It obscures the underlying trend and produces the perverse effect that the tightening of monetary policy causes an apparent rise in recorded inflation. However, the payments are included, and the right hon. Gentleman will be aware that they can have a perverse effect both when the RPI goes up and when it comes down. If the payments were excluded, an alternative measure would need to be added. There is no immediate proposal to exclude them.

Mr. Kinnock: We remember when there were "no immediate proposals" to break the link between pensions and earnings. We remember, too, when there were "no plans" to add new NHS charges. We recall also when there were "no immediate proposals" to freeze child benefit payments. Against such a background of mendacity—*[Interruption.]*—who can believe that the Prime Minister has no plans—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] Yes, it is true. It is true.

With such a record of assiduous mendacity, who can believe that the Prime Minister does not want to take mortgage payments out of the RPI?

Mr. Marlow: The right hon. Gentleman called my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister a liar. He should withdraw it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Allow me to deal with this. The right hon. Gentleman used the word in a general sense and not attributable to the Prime Minister personally.

Mr. Marlow: Coward.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that that word was not directed towards me.

Hon. Members: It was.

Mr. Marlow: I was using the word in a general sense, Mr. Speaker, but if you so wish—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman presumed, and I am sure that he would not do that, to call me a liar, I hope that he will withdraw that immediately.

Mr. Marlow: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. I did not hear what you said, but if you so wish, I will certainly withdraw it.

The Prime Minister: And we remember when there was a promise to increase pensions by either the amount of inflation or by having regard to earnings. The pensioners got neither, because the actual increase in inflation under the Labour Government was too great for Labour to honour its promises and the Labour Government did the biggest cheat on the pensioners that has ever been known since pensions were started.

Mr. Kinnock: That was a pathetic dodge from the queen of frauds. Even if household costs do not figure large in the Thatcher family, they do figure large in families in the rest of Britain. Will the Prime Minister accept that any British retail prices index which does not include mortgage payments would be fraudulent? Is it that which attracts the Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: The biggest fraud on the pensioners cost them the equivalent of £1 billion in 1976 under the Labour Government. Pensioners now have more certainty of their basic pension and of its increasing with inflation than they have ever had before. The right hon. Gentleman knows that mortgage costs are included in the retail prices index. If they were not, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said, there would have to be some other measure of housing cost in the RPI. Any alternative measure would have to go to the advisory committee for consideration. A measure went to the advisory committee on mortgage interest some time ago and the committee turned it down, so mortgage interest payments are in the present retail prices index.

Mr. Kinnock *rose*—— [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh no."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is very exceptional Mr. Kinnock. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."]

Mr. Kinnock: This Prime Minister has taken £5 billion a year off pensioners by breaking the link between pensions and earnings. When she starts to give that back, we will start to respect her.

The Prime Minister: May I point out what the then Mr. David Ennals, now Lord Ennals, said with regard to that when challenged about that assessment. When challenged about the inflation or earnings he said:

> "There is a statutory obligation to take these figures and earnings into account which was done, but"—

said a previous Secretary of State for Social Services—

> "no statutory obligation to get it right."

The Labour party got it wrong.

Q2. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Gorman: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in the run-up to Christmas the Post Office unions are already up to their seasonal nonsense of striking and that nine depots in and around my constituency of Billericay are out on strike? Will she assure the public that, so that they will receive their Christmas post, the Government will remove the one obstacle that prevents the private sector from competing, by lowering the threshold from £1 to 10p, so that private networks can afford to compete with the Post Office in delivering our Christmas cards?

The Prime Minister: I know that there has been some considerable disruption in my hon. Friend's constituency in the counters business and I join her in deploring that. It is extremely ungenerous at this time of year, but, more than that, it is damaging to small businesses, which depend on money and orders coming in for their business to continue. I have taken note of what my hon. Friend said. The Post Office has a monopoly and if this kind of thing continues we shall have to consider precisely what she says —reducing the monopoly threshold from the present level of £1.

Mr. Hume: Given the difficult and emotional relationship between Britain and Ireland over the years, and the serious efforts that the Prime Minister and her Government, together with the Irish Government, have been making over the last number of years to address that issue, what contribution to that process does she think her remarks made on Tuesday—her highly orchestrated pre-judgment of the Irish authorities' attitude before they had taken the decision on the extradition application in accordance with their legal processes? Does the right hon. Lady know that the Belgian authorities were given five months to deal with the same application, which they turned down because the evidence was imprecise and vague? Does the right hon. Lady know that the Irish authorities have extradited 895 people to the United Kingdom throughout the present troubles and in the past 12 months have made the biggest arms finds in our history? How does that square with her accusation that they are only interested in fine words, not actions?

Mr. Speaker: Briefly.

Mr. Hume: Will the right hon. Lady tell her Attorney-General that his behaviour in revealing to the press selected details of a private conversation with his opposite number in Dublin is highly——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is Question Time. The hon. Gentleman should not make a statement.

Mr. Hume *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his say.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the law on extradition was changed unilaterally by the Republic of Ireland. Nevertheless, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General endeavoured fully to comply with the new law. It is now more than five days since all the relevant documents were sent to Dublin and no questions have been raised about the sufficiency of the statements of fact in them. That is an important matter to all of us in the United Kingdom.

Q3. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Jones: Does my right hon. Friend recall that at the time of the passage of the Education Reform Act there were dire warnings from teachers' unions and Opposition Members that parents would not come forward as school governors because of their responsibilities under that Act? Will she contrast that with the experience throughout my constituency, where large numbers of parents have stood for those positions, where there have been high polls and where the quality of candidates coming forward has been superb?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. The extra choice being given by the education reforms of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science has been welcomed up and down the country by many parents and they are coming forward in record numbers to be governors of schools, prepared to take full responsibility, recognising the chances of obtaining a better education for their children. That is welcome.

Q4. **Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Smith: In drawing up her Government's Official Secrets Bill, the Prime Minister and her Home Secretary have excluded from it any rights of public interest as a defence for disclosure. Why have they done that? Has the Prime Minister forgotten that the public interest is what government is supposed to be about?

The Prime Minister: The Bill has been published. I am advised that there are no such rights now as those to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The Bill has, on the whole, been much welcomed as an advance on the previous measure. There will be abundant chances to debate it on Second Reading and in Committee.

Mr. Lawrence: Is my right hon. Friend aware that shortly after the PLO spokesman in London was convincing the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that the PLO would recognise the existence of the state of Israel, the BBC reported that the PLO foreign affairs spokesman in New York denied that any such statement had been made and refused to endorse it? Is my right hon. Friend aware also that the whole House is behind her stand against terrorism? It is perfectly consistent with that stand that any Government should say to anybody——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Briefly. This is not a statement, but Prime Minister's Question Time.

The Prime Minister: As far back as 1985, when we were considering speaking to certain PLO executive members, I made clear my position that three conditions must clearly be met. First, that United Nations resolutions 242 and 338 must be clearly accepted; secondly, that Israel's right to exist behind secure borders must be clearly and explicitly accepted; thirdly, that violence must be utterly rejected. When the Palestinian National Council resolution came out, I took the view that, although it was not absolutely clear, what had been done in respect of United Nations resolution 242, although allied to other United Nations resolutions, was a clear step forward. On the other hand, Israel's right to exist has not been explicitly recognised, nor has violence been utterly renounced.

Patrick Ryan

3.31 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the action taken by Her Majesty's Government to seek the extradition of Patrick Ryan to the United Kingdom.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): The Government have sought the extradition of Patrick Ryan from Belgium and the Metropolitan police sought it latterly from the Republic of Ireland.

In the Belgian proceedings, which followed Patrick Ryan's arrest in Belgium on 30 June 1988, extradition was sought in respect of the following offences: (1) conspiracy to murder; (2) conspiracy to cause explosions; (3) possession of explosives with intent to endanger life or cause serious injury to property; (4) possession of explosive substances without a lawful object.

Our own prosecuting authorities consulted the Belgian prosecuting authority before initiating the extradition proceedings and were given no reason by the Belgian authority to suppose that the request might fail to satisfy Belgian legal requirements. The extradition of Patrick Ryan was authorised by the Belgian court of first instance on 26 September, subject to the approval of the Minister of Justice, and by the Belgian Court of Appeal of Brussels on 12 October in respect of the two conspiracy charges.

As I understand it, Patrick Ryan's case then fell to be considered by the Belgian Minister of Justice. On 25 November—Friday—the Belgian Government refused to order extradition and ordered Patrick Ryan's repatriation to the Irish Republic. On learning on Friday afternoon of the Belgian decision and that Patrick Ryan was expected to arrive in Dublin that evening, an immediate application was made by the Crown prosecution service at Bow street magistrates' court for fresh warrants for Patrick Ryan's arrest, as was necessary to comply with Irish requirements. Warrants were issued in the late afternoon and facsimiles at once transmitted to the Irish authorities in Dublin at 6.20 pm. Facsimiles of the documentation, which the Irish Attorney-General requires under the provisions of the Irish Extradition (Amendment) Act 1987, were transmitted to his Department between 4.30 pm and 6.30 pm that evening.

That documentation contained a full statement of the facts upon which the allegations were founded, a statement setting out the relevant English law, and a certificate by me that it is the Crown prosecution service's clear intention to bring a prosecution and that that prosecuting authority has satisfied itself that there is sufficient admissible evidence to found a prosecution. The documentation with which I provided the Irish Attorney-General last Friday fulfilled the requirements of the legislation.

On Friday the Metropolitan police had requested the Gardai to obtain provisional warrants for the arrest of Patrick Ryan pending the arrival in Dublin of the warrants just issued at Bow street, which in the event were delivered to the Irish authorities in Dublin in the early hours of Saturday. No provisional warrants, however, were sought.

My Department was in touch with its counterpart in Dublin late on Friday night with a view to enabling me to speak to the Irish Attorney-General, Mr. Murray. That was because we had learnt that the Metropolitan police had been told by the Gardai that no action was to be taken on any warrant until the two Attornies-General had spoken. In the event, I spoke to Mr. Murray for the first time when he telephoned me at 10.30 am on Monday. He informed me that he was still considering the documentation. I drew attention to the risk that Ryan might discharge himself from the clinic where he was undergoing treatment, and asked him to make an early decision.

Mr. Murray acknowledged that risk. I told him that if there were any problem with the documentation or any other question I would be immediately available. No question about the adequacy of any of the documentation sent to him for the purpose of the 1987 Act has been raised with me. I understand that Mr. Murray is still considering the application.

Before the effective warrants were obtained on Friday, warrants in draft form were submitted to the Irish Attorney-General's Office on Wednesday 23 November. That followed a helpful practice, for which I am grateful and which has been developed between the two Departments, the law and practice in relation to warrants being different in the Republic of Ireland from that in England. Those documents were sent on a contingency basis lest the Belgians should decide to repatriate Patrick Ryan. The draft warrants did not constitute the sending of a request for extradition: the very purpose of sending drafts to the Irish is to allow them to comment on the form of the warrant. I mention that because of certain misleading publicity.

Irish officials, apart from drawing attention to two minor details and to certain purely presentational matters, expressed themselves content with the form of the proposed warrants. The Bow street warrants took account of those comments on Friday. On Saturday 26 November, the Irish authorities alerted us to the omission by the Bow street chief clerk of a date in the certificates accompaning the warrants. That omission, which we were advised was not a serious matter, was immediately rectified the same day.

We believe that this matter affected neither the Gardai's statutory power to seek provisional warrants from Friday evening nor the statutory power to back the effective warrants on their arrival in Dublin early on Saturday morning.

Mr. Morris: How far have future applications been assisted by the Prime Minister's hysterical outburst on Tuesday, and in particular by her endorsement of the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates)? Does not the Attorney-General agree that Belgium and Ireland are sovereign states and cannot be treated as erring Cabinet Ministers? As the Attorney-General has acknowledged today that there is a difference in practice in each country, should not—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are matters about which the whole House wishes to hear.

Mr. Morris: I am obliged to you, Mr. Speaker.

Should not the Attorney-General have first advised the House? Surely he should not have allowed the Crown prosecution service on his behalf to brief the press, given the danger of prejudicing a fair trial. The Attorney-General knows of my support for him in extradition matters—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] He knows of it and he would be the first to acknowledge it, but why can he not get his act right? What has become of the Home

Secretary's promise that the Director of Public Prosecutions would ensure personally that warrants were checked for accuracy and sufficiency?

Will the Attorney-General confirm that on Wednesday, when draft warrants arrived, Irish Government lawyers pointed out a number of serious flaws—[HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful."]—and that on Thursday the Irish Attorney-General's officials telephoned urging that the correct material be sent over; that on Friday new flaws were discovered, and some of the supporting documents were unintelligible; and that only on Saturday were correct certificates faxed through? If Ryan had been wrongfully arrested, could not that, or future extradition proceedings, be at risk? In any event, he would have had to be released late on Sunday, if arrested on a provisional warrant on Friday.

Will the Attorney-General confirm reports that it was the Irish Government who suggested the possibility of advance warrants and material if things went wrong in Belgium? Why were steps not taken earlier to give them ample time to consider a complicated matter? The Irish seem to have been at fault for five days. The Belgians had five months. What, since Tuesday, is the status of the "close and personal relationship" between the Attorney-General and his opposite number in the Republic, about which he was pleased to tell the House as late as 14 June of this year?

The Attorney-General: If I may deal with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's first question, he knows perfectly well, from his own extensive and distinguished practice in the law, that there is no value in answering a question that is based on a false premise. However, I utterly reject the premise on which he founds his question: that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's observations on Tuesday are in any way to be criticised.

As to future applications for extradition from the Republic of Ireland, I hope that lessons will be learnt from this application which may facilitate what I trust and believe to be the object of both Governments: to bring persons who are suspected of serious offences to justice in the courts of the country where the offences are alleged to have occurred.

I am asked whether I ought to have advised the House first. I do not think that I can be accused of being backward in coming forward with statements. I have volunteered more statements in this House in a shorter time than any other Attorney-General in living memory. [*Laughter*.] However regrettable it is, the situation today is that I have made an application for the extradition of Patrick Ryan and I am waiting for the response of the Irish Attorney-General.

I was asked whether I should get my "act right." I emphasise what is said in the statement—a copy of which is before the right hon. and learned Gentleman—that no complaint or even query has been raised as to the sufficiency or propriety of any of the documentation that is before the Irish Attorney-General. I believe that I have set out, in what I hope is helpful detail, the whole history of the matter.

Much misleading publicity has been given to what took place in connection with draft warrants, sent on a contingency basis, during the earlier part of the last week. They were sent for the specific purpose of their being commented upon by the Irish Government. The comments that were made were incorporated in the effective warrants that were issued on Friday at Bow street. It is true, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, that provisional warrants—for which there is statutory authority in Irish law, as he knows—can be issued before the original warrants arrive in the Irish Republic for backing. That is possible. The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, and rightly has mentioned it, that such warrants have a three-day life. Somebody who is arrested under them has to be released by the end of three days, unless a substantial warrant has been backed.

This case, in which my colleague, the Irish Attorney-General, has already taken five and a half days to consider these matters, gives point to the objections that the British Government raised at the end of last year when the new unilateral legislation was put forward by the Irish Government, giving the Irish Attorney-General the duty to satisfy himself that there is a sufficiency of evidence and a settled intention to prosecute. There will be many cases —and this is not one of them because the Irish Government say that they know where Mr. Ryan is—in which somebody is suddenly arrested and there are three days for the whole of the procedure to be gone through. It is plain that in this case, which has required five and a half days, the procedure is gravely flawed, as we said it would be.

I was asked why, if the Belgians had taken five months, the Irish should be expected to do it more quickly. That is a thoroughly bad point. The Belgian Government requested that we should initiate extradition proceedings. The police then had to investigate the evidence. When the evidence was found to be sufficient to support four charges, the advice of the Belgian authorities was sought, given, and followed through. It was only then, much later, that the proceedings took place in the two courts which authorised the extradition of Patrick Ryan on the conspiracy charges subject to the approval of the Belgian Minister, as I have informed the House today.

Finally, I was asked about my relationship with Mr. Murray. I stand by every word of the description of that relationship that I gave on an earlier occasion. I have a close relationship with Mr. Murray, I trust one of friendship. We each have our duty to perform. I have performed mine and I am quite certain that Mr. Murray will perform his. I just wish that we could reach a decision rather quickly.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend surprised at the attitude of the Irish Government? To put it bluntly, have we not been double-crossed by them? Did they not promise in the Anglo-Irish Agreement to deprive wanted terrorists of immunity from extradition? When they did so deprive them, did they not at the same time give their Attorney-General the power to delay or to veto any warrant—provisional or otherwise—and has not the Irish Attorney-General used that power to the great disadvantage of justice?

The Attorney-General: I appreciate the depth of feeling that lies behind my hon. Friend's question. However, I do not subscribe to the verb he has applied to the Irish Goverment. The power given to the Irish Attorney-General to direct that there shall be no endorsement of an English warrant was given to him in consequence, so it was said by the Irish Government, of the fact that the Irish Government were to ratify the

[The Attorney-General]

European convention on the suppression of terrorism. Whatever the reason for giving it, we pointed out at the time that it would act as an obstacle to extradition. I very much regret to say that it is so proving.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): While recognising that the Prime Minister's remarks expressing surprise about what happened in Belgium were wholly understandable in the circumstances, particularly in the light of what the Attorney-General said about the advice tendered by the Belgian Government, does he accept that comment about proceedings in Ireland does not help when the matter has not been concluded, and advancing arguments about the adequacy or otherwise of what the Government or the Irish Government are doing can be only for partisan advantage and not to further the course of justice?

The Attorney-General: What my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on Tuesday was that the failure to secure the arrest of Patrick Ryan was a matter of very great concern to the British Government. The hon. Gentleman must surely realise that it is a matter of great concern because proceedings are now in train and warrants have been issued. It is not for me to talk about the facts behind the charges that we wish to bring against Patrick Ryan, but the hon. Gentleman knows from the very nature of those charges which I have read out today, how serious the matter is. Of course it is a matter of great concern and every Member of the House, whether Prime Minister or not, is entitled to express his view.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Is it not clear that the decision of the Belgian Minister of Justice not to accede to our request for extradition was taken not on legal grounds but on political grounds? Did not the Belgian Government add to their shame by sending Mr. Ryan to Dublin from Brussels in a Belgian military aircraft? Does my right hon. and learned Friend understand the increasing concern of people within and without Northern Ireland that we should continue to confer upon a Government who harbour suspected terrorists a position of special privilege in relation to that part of this kingdom which has been afflicted most grievously by terrorism?

The Attorney-General: I am afraid that it seems to be the case that the Belgian Government's decision was taken on political grounds. I say that it seems to be the case, because their procedure requires that the Belgian Minister of Justice shall consult the Appeal Court and ask for its recommendation. I have already told the House that we understand that the court of first instance and the Appeal Court had authorised extradition on two conspiracy charges. Therefore, it would seem unlikely that the recommendation of the Court of Appeal would differ from that authorisation. But that is secret, and we do not know whether or not it is so. All that I can say is that it has been reported in the Belgian press, so I understand, that the recommendation was to authorise extradition. If that is the case, it is a very regrettable matter for all who are concerned with the fight against international terrorism, as we have always understood the Belgian Government to be, along with their allies.

It is the case that Patrick Ryan was put into a military aircraft. It is perhaps even more significant that, although we had received several informal assurances that we would have 24 hours' notice between the decision of the Belgian Government and the deportation of Patrick Ryan, we were given no notice at all. That is why, when the warrants were obtained at Bow street, the very greatest haste was necessitated, because he might have been in the air at that time.

I hope that my hon. Friend will excuse me from answering the last part of his question, which he will recognise falls outside my own responsibilities.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): The Attorney-General has confirmed that, for whatever reasons, the Irish authorities are still considering the application. As that consideration is a judicial process concerned with the assessment of evidence, I again ask the Attorney-General whether the Prime Minister's immoderate attempt to apply pressure was unconstitutional, counter-productive and prejudicial to any prospect of a fair trial.

The Attorney-General: No, Sir.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it was deeply regrettable that the Belgian authorities left so little time for the matter to be properly considered? Does he agree that it was an even greater pity that it took so long between Friday and Monday for the matter to be given the consideration that it required on both sides? Furthermore, does he agree that justice is to be found in the interstices of procedure and that, at bottom, we in this country and those in the Irish Republic are both concerned about the repression of terrorism? Is it not the case that, if these matters are not sorted out within the context of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, both countries have an enormous amount to lose?

The Attorney-General: I believe that we must secure between our two countries a more effective procedure for obtaining what we both want, which is the bringing of those suspected of serious offences to justice in the country in which such offences are alleged to have occurred. I have said all that I need to say about the Belgian decision, the reasons why it was taken, and the manner in which it was communicated to the British Government.

As to the procedure that is now going on in the Republic, I have to await the decision of my counterpart, but I draw attention to the fact that, in spite of having asked to be told if there was any difficulty or problem, and having told my counterpart that I would be immediately available if that was of any help, I have heard no word. Therefore, I can only hope that a speedy and favourable decision will be reached.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): As anti-terrorist co-operation from the Dublin Government was the only quid pro quo for the British humiliation of Unionists, is there not an obligation on the Dublin Government to co-operate freely and in a civilised fashion and to make that co-operation on an unconditional and unreserved basis?

The Attorney-General: I believe that no reason can legitimately be given for any failure to co-operate in the fight against terrorism, to which both Governments are committed.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that yesterday, as chairman of the Anglo-Belgian parliamentary group, I saw the Belgian ambassador to tell him of the strength of feeling among hon. Members of this House about what has happened? Can he enlarge on the strength of the evidence about Ryan that was available to the Belgian authorities in this episode, which is all the more distressing following, as it does, the impressive life-saving rescue exercise by the Belgians when the ferry sank off Zeebrugge?

The Attorney-General: I note what my hon. Friend says. I thought it right to send a letter to the Belgian ambassador three or four days before Friday drawing attention to the seriousness of the matters for which we desire to place Patrick Ryan on trial. I cannot talk about the strength of the evidence because, following the issue of the warrant, technically, criminal proceedings are in train.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Is it not important that those against whom there are allegations of being involved in terrorism, whether in Ireland or anywhere else, should be brought to trial promptly? Is it not also true that, whether anyone in the House likes it or not, all the inquiries that I have made in the south of Ireland show that people who do not support the Provisional IRA believe passionately that a fair trial is not obtainable here?

Does the Attorney-General recall that following an agreement made with the Government of the right hon. Member for Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), the Irish Government asked for the Criminal Law (Jurisdiction) Act 1975, under which people may be brought to trial in the country where they are at the time? Would it not be worth considering using that Act? Unless something is done, the man—who has not yet been proved guilty—will not be brought for questioning or for trial.

The Attorney-General: I do not believe there is the slightest justification for any feeling in the Republic of Ireland that there is no prospect of a fair trial in England. We are in no need of lessons on how to devise and implement fair judicial procedures.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the Irish Criminal Law (Jurisdiction) Act. But that cannot be a substitute for extradition under the terms of the extradition arrangements between the two countries. In some cases it is proper to use provisions of that Act and, in appropriate cases, I am delighted to make the necessary request. I did so only last week in the case of Sloan. The Irish Attorney-General has accepted that request and matters are proceeding. Although the use of the Act has not been raised with me as a possibility by the Irish Attorney-General, it would not be appropriate in this case because there is good reason to doubt whether the Irish courts would have jurisdiction under the terms of that Act in respect of two of the four charges.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): The IRA terrorists must be chuckling with delight at the attacks made on the Prime Minister, the Attorney-General—who fills his office with distinction—and his officials who have been seeking the extradition of Patrick Ryan to the United Kingdom. Sadly, such remarks will be quoted in support of the IRA throughout the world. Will the Attorney-General consider extending another invitation to his counterpart in Dublin to get together to resolve the problems that have arisen frequently in the past? Perhaps he might also be able to refute the allegation that has been made in the House this afternoon, time after time in the media, and all over the world, that an Irishman cannot get justice in a British court. If that is so, why do tens of thousands of Irish people from the Republic emigrate to Britain?

The Attorney-General: While I am grateful for those personal remarks, I know it not to be the opinion of the Irish Government that there is no fair trial to be had for an Irishman in this country, and if it were otherwise, how could we explain the amendment to the Irish Extradition Act in 1987? Why not abrogate it completely? I know that that is not the view of the Irish Government, and no shred of justification for it could exist. I am always ready to talk to my opposite number. I put in train attempts to speak to him late on Friday night, but unfortunately he was not able to speak to me until 10.30 on Monday. I have told the House what transpired then. I hope that we shall continue to have a close and sensible relationship. Before I came to the House, I made arrangements for the answer that I was proposing to give to the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) to be faxed to him, although not long before, and I trust that we shall be able to move forward.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The Crown prosecution service told us that there were mistakes in two of the warrants that were sent to Dublin. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] The Irish Government have said that there were two mistakes in those warrants. I tend to take the view of the Crown prosecution service, because it has been making those mistakes consistently for a number of years, and seems to be the expert on it. It is his duty to clarify that question, and I ask the Attorney-General to do so. Has he realised the damage that was done to the opinion of moderate people in Ireland when the incompetence of the Crown prosecution service degenerated into prime ministerial vindictiveness? Will he try to get his colleague the Prime Minister to retract the insults that she made against the Irish Government?

The Attorney-General: If the Crown prosecution service was guilty of as much inaccuracy as was revealed in the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks, there would indeed be cause for anxiety. I made it clear, I hope, in my answer to the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon that, on a contingent basis, draft warrants were submitted to the Irish authorities in the early part of last week. I drew attention to the comments that were made by the Irish in respect of those. Perhaps I can amplify them to a small extent, and without wasting time. Of the two minor details that I mentioned, one consisted of a form of description of the charge that had been settled by leading counsel in this country. The other consisted of one superfluous word in the draft court clerk's certificate. The most significant of the presentational matters that I mentioned consisted of a form previously accepted by the Irish authorities in the recent case of McVeigh.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): What my right hon. and learned Friend has said, the manner in which he has said it, and the frequency with which he comes to discuss these issues in the House is wholly acceptable, as is the way in which he discharges his onerous responsibilities. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Will he take note, and perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office will

[Sir Giles Shaw]

take particular note, that there can be no progress in the fight against terrorism without complete international co-operation? As there have been these difficulties over the technicalities of expressions on documentation, or over the acceptance on either side of the Attorney-General's fence that quick action should be taken, the overall result is a decline in the effectiveness of anti-terrorist measures throughout Ireland, the United Kingdom and the European Community. Will my right hon. and learned Friend make it clear to the Attorney-General in the Irish Republic that if this is the way that things will proceed, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary or my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister cannot maintain the commitment that we have so far shown?

The Attorney-General: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said. I agree, as I think will every hon. Member, with what he went on to say. There is no doubt that the attack upon international terrorism calls for sophisticated co-operation, and there is no doubt that vociferous and sometimes powerful minorities will resent such co-operation. I hope that it is agreed on all sides that they must not be allowed to impede that co-operation. There will be no shortcoming in the co-operation that I and Her Majesty's Government offer to our friends, and we hope for no more than the same in return.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Instead of throwing a fit of tantrums last Tuesday afternoon and whipping up the anti-Irish feelings of some of her Back Benchers—notoriously the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates)—the Prime Minister should have shown a greater awareness of the extradition procedures of other nations. Why is it that those two faulty details of last weekend's extradition warrents, which the Attorney-General seeks to dismiss so lightly, have been a feature of a majority of the extradition warrants that have been directed across the Irish sea during the past three years?

The Attorney-General: I do not accept the last part of the hon. Gentleman's observations.

Mr. Duffy: It is true.

The Attorney-General: Certainly not. I would have thought that he would have welcomed the helpful practice that has grown up between our two Departments, which I mentioned, whereby whenever there is time and it is practicable, draft warrants are submitted on a contingent basis for the very reason that the law and practice of the courts in Ireland relating to warrants is different from that in this country.

Mr. Duffy: Why not get it right?

The Attorney-General: I might suggest that the hon. Gentleman gets it right himself.

Mr. Duffy: I have got it right.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman has asked me a question. I assume in his favour that he would like to hear the answer that I am endeavouring to give. He speaks of defects in the warrant of last weekend. There were no defects. No problem has been raised with me by the Irish Attorney-General. It has not been suggested that there was anything wrong with the warrant of last weekend. There was a problem about the omission of a date in the chief clerk's certificate. We were told that it was not serious and could be corrected on Monday, and it was corrected on Saturday. It has had no effect.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) only makes himself more ridiculous by those remarks? If I were to be criticised by some of my hon. Friends, it would be for having been the most ardent supporter on the Government Benches of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated quite clearly that there is no sign from the Irish Government that any of the warrants are defective, and as my right hon. and learned Friend has made that abundantly clear, both in his statement and in his answers, and as the Irish authorities allege that they know where Ryan is, is there any reason why he should not now be detained, pending a decision?

The Attorney-General: The crucial distinction of this case is that Patrick Ryan, according to the Irish Government, is in a place the whereabouts of which is known to them. Therefore, presumably it is possible for a warrant, if it is backed for execution, to lead to his arrest.

It is quite true that no problem has been raised with me. If there is one, I remain available to do what I can to help, but I cannot help feeling that, as five and a half days have gone by, any insufficiency would have been drawn to my attention by now, if one had been perceived.

I did not deal fully with what was said about my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's intervention last Tuesday. I have read it and have it before me now. I really cannot see that any objection can be taken to her view, expressed no doubt with feeling, that it is

"a matter of very grave concern"—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1988; Vol. 142, c. 574.]

that the arrest has not been authorised.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Read on.

The Attorney-General: I believe that some rather offensive and highly coloured interpretations have today been placed upon her comments.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a private notice question and that we have had more than double the length of time that I would normally allow for it.

Business of the House

4.10 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 5 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Bill.

Motion to take note of EC documents relating to Community finance. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

TUESDAY 6 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 7 DECEMBER and THURSDAY 8 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Water Bill.

FRIDAY 9 DECEMBER—There will be a debate on the multifibre arrangement on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. Details of relevant EC documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

MONDAY 12 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Electricity Bill.

[Monday 5 December 1988

Relevant European Documents

(a) 7271/88	*1989 Budget: Commission's proposals*
(b) 7758/88	*1989 Budget: Preliminary Draft Budget*
(c) 7908/88	*1989 Budget: Draft Budget*
(d) 8996/88	*1989 Preliminary Draft Budget: Letter of Amendment*
(e) 9286/88	*Draft Budget of the European Communities of 1989 changes proposed by the European Parliament*

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 43–xxxv (1987-88) para 5
(b) HC 43–xxxvi (1987-88) para 2
(c) HC 43–xxxix (1987-88) para 5
(d) HC 43–xxxix (1987-88) para 6
(e) HC 15–ii (1988-89) para 4

Friday 9 December 1988

Relevant European Documents

(a) 11580/86	*Yugoslavian Textiles*
(b) 11621/86	*Taiwanese Textiles*
(c) 6104/87	*Taiwanese Textiles*
(d) 7207/87	*Multifibre arrangement: Bilateral Agreement with Thailand*
(e) 6647/88	*Multifibre arrangement: Bilateral Agreement with Hong Kong*
(f) Unnumbered	*Multifibre arrangements: Bilateral Agreements*

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 22–viii (1986-87) para 4
(b) HC 22–viii (1986-87) para 5
(c) HC 22–xx (1986-87) para 3
(d) HC 22–xix (1986-87) para 5
(e) HC 43–xxxii (1987-88) para 4
(f) HC 22–v (1986-87) para 3 and HC 22–viii (1986-87) para 3.]

Mr. Dobson: I thank the Leader of the House for his statement.

First, can he yet tell us when we can expect a statement that the Government have changed their policy on the inclusion of mortgage interest rates in the retail prices index?

Secondly, may I remind the Leader of the House that the Standing Orders of the House require the establishment of a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs? He is responsible for this long-running breach of Standing Orders and breach of faith with the people of Scotland. He and his colleagues are quick to chide others for anything that they think contravenes our rules. Will he try to keep them himself, or does he just think that the rules apply to the Opposition? When will he either set up the Scottish Affairs Select Committee or give us the promised half-day debate about not doing so?

Thirdly, 10 December sees the 40th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on human rights at a time when half the countries of the world have political prisoners, a third of them use torture and Britain still persists in exporting leg irons to several of them?

Finally, will he tell us when we are to have the first Opposition day debate? We have now had 20 days of Government business of one sort or another since the last Opposition day debate and we did not get a fair share in the last Session. When shall we have the first bit of our share in this Session?

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Answer.

Mr. Wakeham: Yes, I certainly will answer.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is a hard person to please. We have just completed six days of debate on the Loyal Address, during which the Opposition chose the subjects for debate. However, I recognise that, under our Standing Orders, the Opposition are entitled to days, and I shall see to it that those are provided. I shall do my best to arrange a debate as soon as possible. The exact date is best discussed through the usual channels.

As for the other questions raised by the hon. Gentleman, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister dealt with the question of the retail prices index. As he is well aware, there are no present plans to make a change in that matter. Of course, any change would have to go through the proper processes, if it were contemplated in the future.

With regard to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, as I have said repeatedly, I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's interpretation of the events. I have put up proposals that are unacceptable to the Opposition, which I deeply regret. I have also offered a time for a debate and I understand that that was not acceptable either. However, I certainly intend to arrange a debate on this matter before Christmas and suggest that the exact timing is best left for discussion through the usual channels.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that human rights are an important matter. I am sorry that time does not permit me to arrange a debate on the day that he suggested. However, there will be occasions between now and Christmas when hon. Members who believe that there are points to be made on that subject will have the opportunity to do so.

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Will my right hon. Friend reflect on the number of "take note" motions on European legislation that we have had recently late in the evening? Such legislation is reviewed by the Select Committee on European Legislation, but, by the time it reaches the Chamber, it is already in force.

Some of those matters, such as that affecting the motor industry, have considerable financial implications. If our colleagues in the European Parliament are unable or unwilling to exercise control over the Commission in this matter, it is most important that Members of this House should be informed so that the interests of their constituents may not be prejudiced by the matter going through without any effective discussion before the decision is taken. Will my right hon. Friend therefore look at the matter and consider finding time for a debate on it, as I am sure that many hon. Members are concerned about the present practice?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the feelings in some parts of the House that these matters do not always work out as satisfactorily as they should, and I agree that they do not.

It is difficult to choose the right moment for these debates. If we have the debates too early in the process, many things have changed before the time for decision has come. Sometimes, particularly at the end of a presidency, things happen very rapidly and we fail to have the debate in the time that we should find it most useful to discuss those issues. The Government believe that these debates are valuable and helpful to negotiations, so it is not I who wish to deny these debates. It is simply a practical difficulty, which I shall do my best to overcome on a day-by-day basis.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Just as the failure of the House to set up a Scottish Select Committee is a reflection of the Government's weakness in Scotland, is it not also a fact that the Scottish provisions for privatisation of electricity, coming in the same Bill as those provisions for England and Wales, are another reflection of that weakness? Will the Leader of the House give an undertaking that at least two days will be devoted to the Second Reading of the Electricity Bill to ensure that the very distinctive Scottish provisions get a proper hearing?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not accept either of those points and, judging from the way in which the hon. Gentleman put his questions, he did not expect me to. I do not accept his interpretation of the position of the Scottish Select Committee. I suspect that we are in this difficulty because of the lack of realism in some parts of the House, but that is another matter. *[Interruption.]* However, it is a matter for the debate, when it comes.

With regard to the Electricity Bill, the way that the Government are proposing to proceed, by a Second Reading of the Bill as published on 12 December, is the best way forward.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): My right hon. Friend has, as is customary, given us the business for next week, but for no more than next week. Does he appreciate that it would not only be for the convenience of Members, but would enable us to do our job better, if we could sometimes have notice of the programme of business a little further ahead?

I imagine that my right hon. Friend is at present discussing with our right hon. Friends the dates for Second Reading debates on a number of Bills that have recently been introduced. Would it be possible for him to consider allowing us to be privy to what is accepted to be a provisional future programme of business so that we can do our job better rather than keeping it to himself until the Thursday of the week before?

Mr. Wakeham: I have no great secrets that I am keeping from my hon. Friend. Business has not been arranged for Tuesday 13 December or any day after that. It will depend on how we get on.

I recognise the force of my hon. Friend's remarks, but I do not see an easy way of altering the current practice. If my hon. Friend or any other hon. Members have a particular interest, we try to be as helpful as we can and give any possible indication of approximate dates.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): When is the subject of televising our proceedings likely to return to the Chamber? Some of us—particularly hon. Members with certain political views—are deeply concerned at having to sit here hour after hour trying to intervene in debates and Question Time and never being called. Is it not time for the House to be televised so that our constituents and the people in the country can see that we are at least trying to raise matters that they are anxious about, even if we are not always successful?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman is far too modest in these matters. My impression is that, in spite of the difficulties under which he labours, he seems to be able to put across his view forcefully. The House will be the poorer if he does not continue to do so. Like other hon. Members, the hon. Gentleman does not always get exactly what he wants, but he does pretty well for all that.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about televising the House. It would not be right for me to anticipate the decisions of the Select Committee considering that matter. It is a complex matter and we are working hard on it. We are making good progress and those of us who spend every Monday evening on the matter will be happy to bring a report back to the House of Commons as soon as we can and for the House to decide what to do then.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will my right hon. Friend undertake to find time between now and the end of the calendar year for a debate on the Channel tunnel fast rail link? Is he aware that options 1 and 2—for north-west Kent—are wholly unacceptable to the people of Dartford? Is he aware that, if the Government allow no opportunity for debate in the near future, the first opportunity for Kent Members to debate the matter for the benefit of their constituents will be on the British Rail private Bill, which will be introduced in the autumn of 1989? That is totally unacceptable to us in Kent.

Mr. Wakeham: I understand the importance of the subject to my hon. Friend and his constituents. I cannot promise a debate before Christmas, but there will be occasions when he will have an opportunity for ventilating the points about which he feels strongly.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Leader of the House reflect on the answer that he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on setting up a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs? We who are not privileged to know the workings of the usual channels are entitled, as the House is, to be given some idea of his thoughts on the matter. Is it not an affront to Scottish opinion—especially when former Conservative Members of the House are talking about a more equal Union—to have, encapsulated in one Bill, the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board privatisation and the South of Scotland Electricity Board privatisation along with electricity privatisation in England and Wales? It is an affront to our equal Union and the Leader of the House, who has strong responsibility here, will put the Union in jeopardy if he continues to behave in this way.

Mr. Wakeham I do not accept that for a minute. It would be a bigger affront to the House if I sought to make the speech that I intend to make when we have a debate on the Scottish Select Committee in the middle of business questions rather than at a proper time and in a properly arranged debate. A motion will be tabled for that debate and it will be tabled in good time. It will enable the hon. Gentleman, should he be called, to make his contribution. I hope that he will not continue to make sedentary interventions, which do not help matters.

Mr. Douglas: You are a disgrace as Leader of the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Douglas —with all due respect.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman asked a question and he is now getting an answer to it.

Mr. Douglas: That is what I am not getting.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman has had the answer, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Is it not highly regrettable that on Monday, after 10 pm, we shall discuss an important European measure, when this week in Parliament there have been three similar debates after 10 pm? Would it not be more helpful if some earlier time could be made available—perhaps at 7 pm, as for private business—for some of the more important Euro-measures so that the House could consider them properly and Ministers did not have to stay up until 1 am, but could have a reasonable rest and pay the measures proper attention?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree, and that is why such a measure is on the Order Paper today. We shall begin to debate it as soon as business questions have been dealt with.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): In view of the Carlisle report on probation, after a summer in which the police stations of England have occasionally been filled to overflowing with prisoners and after another year in which judicial sentences seem to be becoming longer and the rights of defendants are under even greater threat with the threat to the right to silence, does the Leader of the House agree that it is time that we had a debate in the near future on sentencing and how we deal with convicted persons? Surely the time has come when there must be some other solution. If the other place is allowed to discuss the matter, as happened the other day, this House should be able to discuss it, so that we can at least give some vent to our feelings. That may influence how the judiciary and other authorities deal with convicted prisoners.

Mr. Wakeham: I have some sympathy with that point. It is a perfectly reasonable matter for debate, but I have to arrange Government business and, as the hon. Gentleman will willingly agree, some aspects that he raised will be relevant to a number of Bills before the House. The subject that he raises is eminently sensible for an Opposition day, and I suggest that he talks to his hon. Friends on the Front Bench.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Lemington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it is becoming urgent that we should have a debate on the future of the Post Office? Does he recall that we had a serious strike in the summer which damaged small business considerably? Is he aware that there is industrial action at post offices now, particularly in the west midlands? People are becoming worried, and I hope that he will take that on board.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise my hon. Friend's concern, but I cannot see how I can arrange a debate in the immediate future. However, I shall bear the point in mind.

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): The Leader of the House was good enough to tell his hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) that we should perhaps consider a forward programme. He is introducing the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Bill next week. On the horizon—and suggested in this morning's press—over the next two or three weeks are the Security Service Bill and the so-called reform of the Official Secrets Act 1911. When considering this legislation, one should remember the background of GCHQ and legislation for the prevention of terrorism. We are facing a major question of freedom, as it is under attack in a number of ways. I ask the Leader of the House not to introduce the remaining two Bills on the secret service and Official secrets at least until after Christmas so that some consideration may be given to the totality of repression that is being introduced in so short a time.

Mr. Wakeham: It is to protect our freedom that most of the Bills are being brought forward; that will be made abundantly clear in the debates.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): Will my right hon. Friend give the House an early opportunity to remind those who say that it is impossible for an Irishman to receive a fair trial in this country of the case of Shannon and McGlinchey in 1985? They were both extradited from Dublin to Belfast and one of them was accused of murdering a Unicnist Speaker of Stormont and his son. They were both acquitted.

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend makes his point extremely well.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): When will the Leader of the House make time available for an early debate on the important issue of the allocation by the Home Secretary of more officers for the county and Metropolitan police forces? He will recall that, when the matter was last debated in the House, hon. Members from all parties expressed the concern felt by people who live in Leicestershire that no extra police officers had been allocated to Leicestershire for 1988-89. As a decision is imminent, does the Leader of the House agree that we should have a debate on this important issue?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree that these are important matters, but I cannot promise Government time for the debate. However, there will be opportunities that the hon.

[Mr. Wakeham]

Gentleman can use. If the hon. Gentleman is in any doubt about it, I am sure that his hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), who is an expert in raising constituency matters, will give him advice.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that the Order Paper now contains a substantive motion—early-day motion 83—calling for the dismissal of Judge Cassel.

[That this House deplores the recent sentence of two years probation given to a man found guilty of sexual abuse of his 12 year old stepdaughter; considers that the reported statement of Judge Sir Harold Cassel, Q.C., when sentencing the defendant, that his wife's pregnancy 'led to a lack of sexual appetite in the lady and problems for a healthy young husband' effectively condones the crime of sexual assault; and therefore calls for the dismissal of Judge Sir Harold Cassel.]

Is my right hon. Friend aware that Members on both sides of the House wish to discuss that motion at the earliest possible moment so that we can all make it absolutely clear that this House does not consider that a wife's pregnancy is justification for sexually molesting young girls, nor that probation is a sufficient sentence for sexually molesting children of any sort?

Mr. Wakeham: I have seen the early-day motion and I recognise the strength of feeling. My right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is considering these matters, so it is right for me to make no further comment.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): To return to the point made by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), does the Leader of the House accept that the workings of the usual channels on the Scottish Affairs Select Committee have been particularly murky since they have denied access to information, not only to individual hon. Members but to parties which wish to see the Committee established? Is his promise of a debate before Christmas to be taken any more seriously than his promises last Session that there would be a debate before the House rose in November? Will such a debate be on a positive motion or will the Government merely give up the attempt ever to establish the Committee?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not accept for a minute that any promises I have given to the House have not been fulfilled. I share the hon. Lady's concern about the workings of the usual channels in this matter, because they have not been able to produce a solution which is satisfactory to both sides. For that reason we shall find time for a debate and it will be on a motion to resolve the matter. I cannot announce the terms of the motion now.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): If we cannot have a debate next week on the Post Office, can we at least have a statement from the Secretary of State for Employment that industrial relations in the Post Office will be referred to ACAS for an impartial report? Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents in Melton Mowbray have had no post for the past two and a half weeks and that this is the third such dispute this year? It is absolutely ruinous for small businesses.

Mr. Wakeham: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I shall certainly refer his suggestion to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who will obviously want to consider the best way to deal with the matter.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): I thank the Leader of the House for his kind compliment earlier, but on this occasion my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) needs help from the right hon. Gentleman, not from me: there should be a debate on police resources in Leicestershire and why people in the city of Leicester have been allowed no additional police for the past two years despite requests from the chief constables. Does the Leader of the House agree that there should also be a debate on why we are receiving no help from the Home Secretary when crime has doubled in the county? Can we at least ask the right hon. Gentleman to be kind enough to request a statement from the Home Secretary before the recess?

Mr. Wakeham: I shall certainly refer the matter to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): Can my right hon. Friend find time to discuss the General Development Order which contains the somewhat surprising proposal that clay pigeon shooting on any one site should be cut from 28 to 14 days before planning permission is required? That was introduced with no discussion either with Members of Parliament or interested parties and should not continue.

Mr. Wakeham: I want to apologise to my hon. Friend on behalf of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment who accepts that the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association should have been among the 250 bodies that have been consulted. In view of that, my hon. Friend proposes to consult the association as well as the Sports Council and others soon on whether an amendment should be made to the order to revert to a maximum of 28 days' permitted use of rights for clay pigeon shooting.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The Leader of the House will know that this House has not debated the spread of AIDS in recent memory. Is he aware that hon. Members like me want to make the point that the Government's record is lamentable, there having been precious few cautionary measures or publicity for at-risk groups, such as prisoners, the armed forces and the business travelling public, and little hospital treatment and community care for sufferers? When can we have a debate on this important subject?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that the hon. Gentleman takes this matter seriously, as do the Government, and I hope that he does not seek to turn it into a partisan issue. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health is appreciative of the co-operation of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) in discussions and we hope to have as much of a bipartisan approach to this important problem as possible. The tone of the hon. Gentleman's remarks did not quite show that. Not long ago, we had debates on the subject, but the hon. Gentleman's memory may not be as long as mine, and there may well be an occasion for another debate in the not too distant future. It is perfectly right and proper that we should discuss these matters and I shall bear his request in mind.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): In view of the sentence passed by Judge Harold Cassel at Knightsbridge Crown court on a police officer who indecently assaulted a young girl, will my right hon. Friend have a word with the Home Secretary and ask him to invoke the provision contained in the Criminal Justice Act 1987 that would entitle the Attorney-General to refer that lenient sentence to the Court of Appeal for re-examination? It has not yet been invoked. Does my right hon. Friend agree that all the Labour Members who voted against that provision may now rethink their position in the light of this case?

Mr. Wakeham: The Government are naturally anxious about any statement made by a public figure which may be interpreted as condoning the sexual abuse of children. However, the remarks attributed to Judge Cassel were made in the context of his judicial duties, and it would be constitutionally improper for the Government to comment further. I understand that my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor is calling for a report into the matter and I shall make my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary aware of my hon. Friend's points.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The right hon. Gentleman will realise that since 1979 this Government have spent billions of pounds on the police service—on manpower requirements, earnings and equipment needed to do the job efficiently. Will he on behalf of his Government now seriously consider having a debate on the important question of law and order because my colleagues and I feel that it is necessary? We aim to be helpful. Figures announced today show that crime has increased by 50 per cent. since 1979. That is a shocking record. Let us do something about it.

Mr. Wakeham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his recognition of the substantial amount of increased resources—about 50 per cent. in real terms—that the Government have spent in support of policies dealing with law and order. It is a major problem. We had a day's debate on home affairs during the Queen's Speech debate when my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) raised these matters. I agree that we should have another debate, but I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman one, however important the matter, in the near future.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Does my right hon. Friend believe that there is what is called a democratic deficit in the ability of elected representatives at whatever level to scrutinise and amend important European legislation?

Mr. Wakeham: What I do recognise is that, in any House of Commons, as was made abundantly clear to those of us who sat through an interesting debate on procedure last night—I am not sure whether my hon. Friend was able to be with us—one thing is clear: if we increase the amount of time that we spend on one subject, we reduce the amount of time that we can spend on another. I do not pretend for one minute that our present arrangements are perfect, nor do I pretend that each hon. Member might not have a different balance. I shall bring forward proposals for change when I am convinced that there is a reasonable chance of a majority being in favour of them.

I do not think that the issue which my hon. Friend raises is one of the areas where we established last night that we could make progress, but I shall consider it. I read the interesting article written by my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) in *The Times* last week. I am sorry that he has not been well. I hope that he will soon be better and among us again. Had he been well, I think that he would have made those points in last night's debate.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Will the Leader of the House consider the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) are not alone in wanting a debate on policing? I also would like such a debate. There is much anxiety in Greater Manchester—the police authority and the chief constable believe that there are not enough policemen and women to do the very necessary job of the police. The Leader of the House knows that, from time to time, we have debates in Government time on the Metropolitan police because of the constitutional arrangement which applies to that force. I put it to the Leader of the House as a serious point that it is about time that we had a debate on this important matter of police resources throughout the country.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that that is a serious question. I treat it perfectly seriously. We had a debate on home affairs recently during the debate on the Loyal Address. I would like to satisfy all the demands on our time, but I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman a debate in the immediate future.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Can I be helpful to the Leader of the House in terms of his medium-term planning? Will he take into account the fact that, whenever he decides to slip in the writ for the Richmond, Yorks by-election, some of us will be in our places in the hope of exploring how, if the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) is clean enough, in terms of the deception of the House, to go to Brussels, that can mean only one thing—that she is not clean enough to be in No. 10 Downing street?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not make allegations of that kind. Will he kindly withdraw those allegations made against the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) and the Prime Minister?

Mr. Dalyell: I do not want to get into any kind of trouble with the Chair. Of course I withdraw, but I must say that, having looked at *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, you may care to reflect on whether what I have said is unparliamentary. The word I used was "clean".

If the Leader of the House's memory is as good as he boasts, could he explain during the debate on the writ why the Opposition Chief Whip, as documented in detail in Magnus Linklater's story of Westland, "Not with Honour", was so vehement that the right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks could not continue as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry?

Mr. Wakeham: I imagine that the Opposition Chief Whip will not move the writ for the hon. Gentleman's constituency while he is still a Member; nor will my right hon. and learned Friend the Government Chief Whip

[Mr. Wakeham]

move the writ while my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan) is still a Member.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) made the most scurrilous and un——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I dealt with that at the time.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Leader of the House have a word with the Secretary of State for Energy and ask him to make a statement at the Dispatch Box on the announcement this week by British Coal that the Union of Democratic Mineworkers is to have negotiating rights at the two new super-pits which have been developed in Britain, although it may not have any members at either pit?

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire, West): Wait and see.

Mr. Skinner: It is scandalous that a party and a Government who brag about democracy will allow British Coal to give negotiating rights to a union even though it has no members, albeit it is a bosses'union. It is almost like telling Tiny Rowland that he can negotiate on behalf of Harrods shareholders.

Mr. Wakeham: I imagine that the hon. Gentleman will be making the same point when he and Arthur Scargill are the only two members left in his union. The question that I think he raises is one for the management and unions of the industry, not for my right hon. Friend.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I, as a Westminster ratepayer and Member, ask the Leader of the House whether we can have a statement on the rate support grant settlement implications of the sale of the lease on Conservative Central Office by Westminster city council?

Is the Leader of the House aware that Westminster city council's internal auditors have asked the chairman of the Conservative party for details of the transaction involving the sale of the lease acquired from Westminster city council, and that he had to date refused to provide that information? Westminster ratepayers want that information and are entitled to have it in the public interest. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the questions asked by the auditor are fully answered? The public in Westminster want to know about this massive property speculation that the Tory party is undertaking.

Mr. Wakeham: I will not add anything to what has already been said about this except to ask why, as a ratepayer and constituent in Westminster, does the hon. Gentleman not have a word with his Member of Parliament—my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Because he is the chairman of the Tory party.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Cash: Further to my earlier point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have dealt with that.

Mr. Banks: May I bring the Leader of the House back to the televising of Parliament? During last night's debate on procedure, I heard two members of his Committee talking about "if" we have the televising of Parliament rather than "when". Will the right hon. Gentleman give us a chance to discuss the report, a copy of which I have here, produced by the Procedure Committee on the implications for procedure of the televising of Parliament? That would give us something to talk about while we are waiting for the Leader of the House's Committee to give us a report to discuss.

I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman will not want to get too deeply drawn into the rumours that fly about this place, but will he make it clear that the rumour that it will be at least two years before we have television cameras——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: And the rest.

Mr. Banks: "And the rest," says one of the members of the right hon. Gentleman's Committee. Will he confirm that the rumour that it will be at least two years before we have television cameras in is unfounded?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Member has clearly had a tiring few days. He arrived late for yesterday's debate because he had been addressing the good citizens of Weybridge, I think, in the forlorn hope of bolstering the Labour party in that constituency. He then produced a book about fights in the House of Commons in about 1860 or 1870——

Mr. Banks: 1873.

Mr. Wakeham: —1873, but he did not say whether he hoped to move forward to those days. If the hon. Gentleman had been here for the whole of the debate and if he had not been reading his interesting books, he would have known that we discussed the report which he waved around. My hon. Friends who said "if" rather than "when" were of course quite right, because the Select Committee's report has to come before the House and the House has to decide on the basis of that report.

Mr. Banks: What about the rumour?

Proceedings of the House

4.48 pm

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you have anything to add to the statement that you made yesterday about the debate on the Loyal Address? You may recall that a number of my colleagues pointed out in the subsequent exchanges that the House was in some difficulty because it had not had sight of a letter which the Editor of *Hansard* apparently sent to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) some weeks ago.

Mr. Speaker *rose*——

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North) *rose*——

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No, I am on my feet.

I have had a letter from the Editor of *Hansard.* However, before I read it to the House, it would be appropriate for me to give a full account of what took place. My statement is rather long but I ask the House to listen carefully.

It is necessary for me to set out the sequence of events as they have now been established in order to be entirely fair to all involved in this incident. It is clear that there were facts to be established, and that, in the first instance, the wrong information was given about what happened.

The hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) knew that the *Official Report* of 25 October contained an error. As a result of the matter being raised, it is now possible to set the record straight. On 25 October, in a debate on the economy, the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) as follows:

> "The hon. Gentleman talks of the need for self-discipline. In view of his party's wild promises to spend money, will he say how much more than £38 billion his party would now spend?"

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is recorded in *Hansard* as replying:

> "I do not know from where the hon. Gentleman gets his figures, but they are clearly wrong. If he produces a list for me I shall look at it, but I can tell him that there is no such commitment."—[*Official Report*, 25 October 1988; Vol. 139, c. 174.]

It is now agreed on all sides that what the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East actually said was, "there are no such commitments."

On 27 October, the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) asked me about the accuracy of the report. I informed the House that the report was wrong and added:

> "On reflection, the *Official Report* accepts that this change should not have been made and has expressed its regret."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1988; Vol. 139, c. 494.]

That statement left the House with the impression that the change had been made at the request of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East and that misapprehension arose because at the time the Editor thought that that had been the case.

The Editor subsequently wrote to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East apologising for the error and explaining that he had since discovered that the change had been made by a member of his staff. The Editor sent me a copy of this letter, but since it was not addressed to me I was not at liberty to read its terms to the House as I was asked to do yesterday. I was, however, in a position to correct the hon. Member for Suffolk, South when he alleged on Tuesday that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East had sought to

> "pressurise the Official Reporters to amend *Hansard.*"—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1988; Vol. 142, c. 582.]

I also made it clear, in column 583, that this was on the basis of fresh information supplied by the Editor since my statement on 27 October, which I now know to be misleading.

I now confirm that there is no truth in any suggestion that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East either changed the text of what was proposed to be reported or asked for it to be changed.

So that the precise order of events may be placed on record, I have asked for a letter from the Editor which I shall now read:

> "You have asked me for an explanation of how the misreporting of Mr. Gordon Brown on 25 October occurred.
>
> Initially, the reporter reported exactly the words used by Mr. Brown. That is to say, Mr. Brown's response to Mr. Peter Thurnham's intervention was in the plural. The senior sub-editor decided that the response was more grammatically put by using the singular. On reflection, he reverted to the plural but after more consideration he went back to the singular. These several changes of mind resulted in the typescript being untidy. When Mr. Brown read the typescript, he improved the legibility of that final sub-editorial alteration. He did not make any alteration to what the sub-editor had finally decided. When, following normal practice, the sub-editor checked for any alterations by the Member concerned, he saw that Mr. Brown had merely improved legibility. He saw no reason to assume that an alteration of fact had been made and had he done so, again following normal rules he would not have allowed the change. At no time did Mr. Brown discuss that or any other part of his speech with the sub-editors.
>
> I stress again that the responsibility for the error is entirely mine. I deeply regret the embarrassment that has been caused to you and the House, especially to Mr. Brown and Mr. Yeo."

That is the text of the Editor's letter to me.

The House is aware that I have already regretted the way in which the issue was raised. I also referred yesterday to the fact that I would deplore it if there were any truth in the suggestions that there had been an organised attempt to disrupt Tuesday's debate. [HON. MEMBERS: "There was."] Order. Perhaps in my own interest I should make it clear that I was not making an accusation that there had been such organisation, let alone suggesting who might have been responsible for it.

I apologise to the House for the length of this statement. It cannot be debated now. If there is a desire to pursue any of the matters my statement contains, I hope that the House will first take time to consider it and then seek advice about the appropriate ways of taking the matter further.

Mr. Robert Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House is normally an extremely tolerant place. The House understands perfectly well that some hon. Members use intemperate and perhaps unparliamentary language. The House also understands that sometimes in the passion of events some hon. Members behave in a way which, on reflection, they would rather not have done. However, the tolerance of the House is such that if an hon. Member, even on reflection, finally apologises, that is accepted and is the end of the matter. I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that the way in which the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) refused to do that means that the continued efforts to raise the matter are a sad attempt to rescue the tattered reputation, credibility and future of the hon. Member for Suffolk, South.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the House will do as I said in my final comment and reflect carefully upon the matter. I called upon the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) at the time to withdraw an allegation that he made, and he did so.

Points of Order

4.58 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During Prime Minister's Question Time I made an intervention in the heat of the moment which might have appeared to cast some aspersion on the Chair and yourself. If that is the case, I totally and unreservedly withdraw it. I would not wish to raise a point of order today for that reason. However, as you so rightly said, if points of order are to be raised, they should be raised at the first possible opportunity.

Hansard, page 432—[HON. MEMBERS: "Erskine May?"] —"Erskine May"; I thank the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Page 432 of "Erskine May" lists expressions which are unparliamentary. That includes the accusation of right hon. and hon. Members of "misrepresentation". The Leader of the Opposition accused the Prime Minister of mendacity in various particulars. If one looks——

Mr. Speaker: Order. He did not do that. I made that plain at the time. It was a general accusation which was not made personally. *[Interruption.]* I suspect that I know "Erskine May" rather better than the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow). He knows that personal accusations against hon. Members are unparliamentary and are not allowed. In the cut and thrust of debate, general accusations are frequently made.

Mr. Marlow: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can I ask you to look at the written text when it appears in the *Official Report* tomorrow and if you wish to reflect on your judgment, perhaps you would be kind enough to come back tomorrow?

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): On a different point of order, Mr. Speaker. About nine months ago, you made a statement following four questions having been asked by the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition during Prime Minister's Question Time. There may not be many Labour Back Benchers sitting behind the right hon. Gentleman who wish to cross swords with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but many Conservative Members wish to participate in Prime Minister's Question Time. Nearly 10 minutes passed today before any Back-Bench Member had the opportunity to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker. Will you say that you will not allow the Leader of the Opposition so much time during future Prime Minister's Question Times?

Mr. Speaker: This occurs from time to time. It occurred when the hon. Gentleman's party was in opposition. I cannot do what he asks.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I raise a point of order, Mr. Speaker, which you said, when the matter arose, could be dealt with a little later.

Mr. Speaker: I said that I had dealt with the matter at the time. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise it again, I will hear him.

Mr. Cash: I understood the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) to say that he did not wish to get into trouble with you, Mr. Speaker. That was not necessarily a withdrawal of the allegation in itself. It is a matter on which we should have at least some further consideration.

Mr. Speaker: I shall read *Hansard* tomorrow, but I heard what the hon. Gentleman said.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR MONDAY 19 DECEMBER

The Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens
Mr. John Greenway
Dame Jill Knight

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the three motions.

Ordered,

That the draft Advice and Assistance (Scotland) (Prospective Cost) (No. 3) Regulations 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Regulations 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986 Amendment Regulations 1988 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Mr. Speaker: I shall now take the point of order of the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). I hope that it is a matter with which I can deal.

Mr. Mullin: It is, Mr. Speaker. You may have noticed that the Attorney-General packed up his files to go home before you announced, Mr. Speaker, that you were calling time on the private notice question. Is it in order for the Attorney-General to know in advance how long you intend to allow for such a question?

Mr. Speaker: I have no idea how the Attorney-General would know that. Only I know when I shall call time, and I do not pass on that information to anyone else.

Fisheries

5.4 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move:

That this House takes note of the Commission's amended proposals on total allowable catches and quotas for 1989 described in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum of 30th November 1988, European Community Document No. 9312/88 on total allowable catches and quotas for 1989, the Commission proposal on the 1989 Reciprocal Fisheries Agreement with Norway described in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum of 23rd November 1988, the Commission proposal on mesh sizes described in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum of 30th November 1988, European Community Document No. 9185/88 on fishery guide prices and of the Government's intention to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for the United Kingdom fishing industry for 1989 consistent with the requirements of conservation of stocks.

We are grateful, as on previous occasions, to the Select Committee on European Legislation for its consideration of documents referred to in the motion. I am sorry that complete proposals were not available for its meeting on 23 November, but we were able to provide these for consideration at its meeting yesterday. I realise that the Committee and the House have been asked to address the fisheries opportunities for 1989 with only short notice of the Commission's full proposals. I agree that that is unsatisfactory. With advice from the scientists delayed until the autumn surveys, and the December Council of Fisheries Ministers meeting having been brought forward, we have all been squeezed. That explains the short notice. This is, however, a very important debate, and we thought it right to have it in good time to enable us to take full account of the views of the House in our preparations for the Council of Fisheries Ministers meeting next week.

First, let me report to the House the outcome of the Community's annual consultations with Norway which concluded in the early hours of this morning. The details of this are in an explanatory memorandum which was placed in the Vote Office earlier today. Briefly the agreement confirms the Commission's proposals for total allowable catches of North sea cod and haddock. which are jointly managed with Norway. It modifies the Commission's proposals to reduce the TAC for western mackerel by 20 per cent. to a 12·7 per cent. reduction, but a reciprocal cut in Norway's own quota has been achieved. Importantly, Norway has agreed to flexibility in catching the western mackerel stock east of 4 deg west to which I will refer later. Our herring opportunities will be slightly greater than last year. Our quota for cod in north Norway will, however, be almost halved under the agreement because of the state of the stocks but our distant water fleet can look forward to increased opportunities off west Greenland. I shall return to some of these matters later.

1988 has been a mixed year for the United Kingdom fishing industry, and one not without its difficulties. The total value of landings during the first three quarters of the year was 5 per cent. lower than in the same period in 1987, but that was a record year. Fishermen are fully aware that the fisheries management decisions are certainly not the only reason for that slight decline. In some cases, the fish, for purely biological reasons, have not always been sufficiently plentiful for legitimate quota opportunities to be fully exploited. And there have been cases where the

[Mr. John MacGregor]

industry itself has found it difficult to manage its own sectoral quotas to the satisfaction of all those directly involved.

During this year we have seen cuts in quotas of cod at north Norway and Svalbard, although that has not unduly fettered the industry as there is still some quota left to take. We have found the quota for Channel cod inadequate but have not been able to take anywhere near the quota for North sea haddock because of the state of the stock.

There are, however, plus points. We achieved a change in the minimum landing size for nephrops which has helped the west of Scotland and northern Irish industries without adversely affecting the North sea. We have changed the price arrangements for herring so that the withdrawal system can operate and carry-over premia obtained. We have secured a ceiling on expenditure on the costly tuna regime. We see on 1 January 1989 the final step to the introduction of a 90 mm mesh size in the North sea, which should assist conservation of the stocks.

The main purpose of this debate, however, is to look to the future and in particular the prospects for 1989. The Commission's proposals present a clear picture of what these might be. I do appreciate that in some respects these are a cause for concern.

As I have often stated, not least on the last occasion that we debated fisheries, the Government are firmly committed to the conservation and efficient management of all the fish stocks on which our industry depends. We must ensure that short-term gains do not imperil the longer-term viability of the industry, and that point cannot be repeated too often because it is of such importance for the long-term stability and prosperity of our industry.

The Commission's proposals on total allowable catches where available reflect the objective advice of international scientists. Where sufficient scientific data is not yet available, less stringent though equally important precautionary TACs are recommended. These are designed to reflect the needs of the industry provided that the level of effort by the fishermen shows no significant growth.

The TACs for the main whitefish stocks in the North sea are, as I have already said, subject to agreement with Norway during the annual consultations. The Commission and Norway in provisionally fixing the TACs for 1989 have had very much in mind the scientific advice which seeks a general cut in mortality rates for these stocks of 20 per cent. This approach is necessary in order to improve the exploitation pattern in the North sea for what is essentially a mixed fishery. The proposal is intended to have the very desirable effect of minimising the quantity of discards, particularly in the whiting and the hard-pressed haddock fishery.

The proposed TAC for North sea cod is 124,000 tonnes and for haddock 68,000 tonnes. These proposals reflect the fact that we are heavily dependent upon individual year classes and a poor year class spells serious consequences for quotas. The spawning stock biomasses are at unprecedentedly low levels. The Government are well aware that both these proposals will present the fishing industry with severe cuts in their fishing opportunities and this is an issue which we will be examining with particular care in the Council meeting. However, we shall have to take proper account of the biological imperatives. We must ensure that we do not settle for short-term gains which will make the long-term losses even greater. The possibility of the collapse of those important fisheries might be at stake and we must bear that in mind and probe it particularly closely.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: Many hon. Members wish to speak in this debate which has now been truncated. It might be better if I did not give way and allowed my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to respond to the points that have been raised.

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: If I gave way once, I would have to give way again. It is probably better that I do not give way in view of the shortness of time.

Mr. Wallace: The right hon. Gentleman is frit.

Mr. MacGregor: No, not at all. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will reply to as many of the points that he can in the short time available.

For saithe and whiting where the proposed TACs are only very marginally different from last year at 170,000 tonnes and 115,000 tonnes respectively, the fisheries will be less restrictive, whilst for plaice the proposal is to retain the current TAC level of 175,000 tonnes. For North sea sole, which is not jointly managed with Norway, the Commission is proposing a TAC of 14,000 tonnes, as in 1988. In addition, given the close relationship between sole and plaice fisheries, the plaice TAC is recommended at a level which would require conservation measures to protect the associated sole fishery. On Monday the Commission therefore presented proposals for both a restriction of the size of beam trawlers in the North sea and an increase in minimum mesh size for the first six months of the year. I am aware that that is causing concern and we are urgently examining the likely impact on our industry in order to strike a balance between the difficulties that it might present to our industry against the long-term gain of healthy sole stock levels. As on previous occasions, we shall be exploring the possibility of enhancing our quota through a swap with another member state.

We are disappointed that the Commission proposal for a precautionary TAC for Channel cod is no higher than this year's original TAC, prior to the upward adjustment made subsequently which we pressed for and achieved at the October Council meeting. We shall be pressing the Commission for a more realistic approach to such precautionary TACs. I am pleased, however, that the precautionary TAC for plaice in the Channel has been increased.

On the north-west coast of the United Kingdom the proposals are for a slight decrease in quotas of haddock, saithe, hake and anglerfish, which reflect mainly the annual variations in stocks that we have to expect with biological and environmental factors.

One of the most intractable problems facing the Community and Norway in recent years has concerned western mackerel. The House will be familiar with the difficulties which our own industry has faced in not being able to pursue the shoals as they have crossed the 4 deg west line from the western area into the North sea. It was with considerable disappointment that, notwithstanding the fact that the Commission negotiated the principle of flexibility with Norway a year ago, the Council failed last December, in spite of our considerable efforts, to agree to the implementing of this technical solution to a major Community problem.

In the interim, the difficulties have not gone away. If anything, they have increased. I therefore welcome the fact that the Commission has been able to negotiate again the principle of flexibility with Norway. The package this year is somewhat more comprehensive than formerly in that the Commission has now agreed with Norway to recommend to the Council that the autonomously determined western mackerel TAC should be set at a limit which will reduce the level of catches. That, however, is in line with scientific data available for this important stock. It is helpful therefore that the Commission has also been able to negotiate a more restrictive level of Norwegian catches in its exclusive zone north of 62 deg and that both parties are agreed on the desirability of protecting that stock.

At the Council last June when we found no support for flexibility around 4 deg west we warned that we would be raising the matter again. We did that strongly in October pointing out that the problem, far from going away, was, if anything, deepening and a solution had to be found. That prepared the way for the consultations with Norway and strengthened the Commission's resolve to secure the principle of flexibility. At the Council meeting next week we shall be pressing very strongly for the principle of flexibility around the 4 deg line to be implemented. I think that it is fair to say that with our unceasing efforts the Commission and other member states are very much more alive this year to the necessity to resolve this important technical problem.

Finally, on pelagic opportunities, I wish briefly to mention herring in the North sea. For 1989, scientific advice suggests a cautious policy in respect of the level of TAC. Consequently, the Commission has agreed with Norway that for 1989 that should be set at 514,000 tonnes. This should enable the spawning stock biomass to recover from current levels. In those circumstances, the Commission has again agreed the zonal attachment for Norway should be 29 per cent., representing 149,000 tonnes. However, the level of transfers by the Community to Norway will be considerably down on the 1988 figure of 53,000 tonnes to 17,000 tonnes, thus enabling opportunities for United Kingdom fishermen to be slightly above current levels.

Of course, once the TACs and United Kingdom quotas have been agreed, we have to decide on their allocation among our fishermen. For the main North sea and west of Scotland stocks, that involves allocations both to those producer organisations which have taken on quota management responsibilities, and to other fishermen in the so-called non-sector. We shall be aiming to better last year's timetable and, provided that we get the necessary information from the industry, we expect to notify interim allocations at the end of January.

We have also continued our strenuous efforts to deal with the quota hopper problem. The Merchant Shipping Act 1988 provides for new tighter registration arrangements for fishing vessels. I am glad to say that those arrangements came into effect today. They require that vessels on our fishing vessel register should be predominantly owned and controlled by British citizens resident in this country. I fully share the strong concern that has been felt in this House and among our fishermen on this issue, and I know that the new arrangements have been welcomed by our fishermen.

At the same time we have continued to defend vigorously the licensing conditions which we introduced to regulate the crewing and operations of fishing vessels with United Kingdom licences. The Advocate-General's recent advice to the European Court in the Agegate and Jaderow cases has been encouraging and we now await the court's decisions.

In addition to our national measures, we have also pressed for Community action. I am very pleased that the October Fisheries Council agreed new control measures which will allow us to require other member states to report to us on a vessel-by-vessel basis landings there by United Kingdom vessels and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for the vigorous efforts that he made to achieve this. These measures were originally set out in document 4893/88 which is amongst those under discussion in the debate today.

The proposals for guide prices for 1989 were agreed at the Council on 28 November following the advice of the Scrutiny Committee that this debate need not hold up adoption. I am very pleased that we have been able to secure a seasonal price for herring which, coupled with the facility to use carryover premium for herring which we secured earlier this year, means that our industry now has a real chance to take advantage of the market support arrangements. The House may recall that the Community have had three reports on the herring market, the third of which is mentioned in the motion, which addressed the problem of herring marketing. That has been of particular concern, I know, to our pelagic fleet in Scotland. I am sure that the measures that we have now secured should give them a firm base on which to build. Other changes were comparatively minor, generally 1 per cent. or 2 per cent. difference or no change. From the comments that we have had from the fishing industry these prices would seem satisfactory.

To sum up, I recognise that this will not be an easy year for some of our fishing industry. Opportunities will be more limited, because of the position of the stocks. Nevertheless, by making the most of the swap mechanism, we hope to maximise usable opportunities to our industry. Let us remember that overall the common fisheries policy is serving us well as the value of landings has increased by 50 per cent. between 1983 and 1987 with only minor fluctuations in the tonnages landed.

Looking to the future, strong measures taken now on TACs should ensure better TACs in the future. We in the Community must also continue to develop sensible ideas on technical conservation measures which are complementary to TACs.

Mr. Archie Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: In fairness I said that I was not going to give way. I know that many hon. Members wish to speak. This is their main opportunity in the year and it is important that they should have the chance to express their views. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will respond at the end. We shall both be at the important Council meeting and I shall be listening throughout the debate.

[Mr. MacGregor]

All this can be done within the framework of the common fisheries policy, to which we are fully committed. I shall listen carefully to the arguments and my hon. Friend and I shall be reflecting on all the points made during the debate.

I can assure the House that my colleagues and I will do all that we can at next week's Council to ensure that we maximise the opportunities for our industry within biologically safe limits so that we also preserve its future prosperity. I hope that that approach will have the support of the House.

5.20 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Here we are yet again at the tail end of the year—I almost said at the tail end of the bank—debating total allowable catches and quotas for the new year. I have a great deal of sympathy with the Select Committee on European Legislation which noted that

> "late publication by the Commission of its fisheries proposals is a perennial problem and reiterates the concern it expressed last year about this and the prejudicial effect on the chances for proper Parliamentary scrutiny."

That is a significant problem for the House. Here we are, four weeks from the end of the year, and we are just debating the proposals for TACs. That is no way to manage an ice-cream cart, let alone an industry which gives employment to 120,000 people, many of whom live in remote constituencies.

Most of our 17,000 fishermen are facing a bleak—not an uneasy—new year with some of these TACs. In May this year, speaking at the annual general meeting of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, the Minister said:

> "The Common fisheries policy has brought the British fishing industry stability and prosperity . . . under the CFP the industry can look to the future with confidence."

Not many of them can look to the near future with any confidence.

The Minister has repeated today that the CFP appears to be working fairly well, but British fishermen are much less sanguine than he appears to think. White fish prices are down. They continue to decline and here we are facing a savage cut in certain quotas.

I feel deeply sorry for our fishermen. We cannot blame them for some of the hostility that they are now displaying towards the CFP. Among fishermen, the CFP commands the growing disrespect and lack of trust that many of our farmers show towards the common agricultural policy.

One stark example of that anger and distrust has been expressed recently by the English Channel fishermen who depend largely upon cod, but, unlike the French, are denied reasonable and fair access to the stock. I think that I am correct in saying that the French share of that particular cod quota is 76 per cent., while our fishermen are given a miserly 8·3 per cent.

The British fishermen suffered a closure of the Channel cod fishery in the middle of April. It was opened for two weeks in October and, I am pleased to be able to say, thanks to the prompt delivery of the press release from the Ministry, it was reopened yesterday at 2400 hours.

That two-weeks fishing effort was damaged, as many other cod fisheries were damaged, by the supply of Icelandic cod, principally to the Humberside markets. Fishermen in England and Scotland have sufferd from those Icelandic supplies. Is it the case, as many fishermen allege, that supplies are coming in from Iceland below the reference price? If so, it is a disgrace.

There is no way that the French will agree to any revision of the share of the cod fishery catch. They will defend the CFP with all the charm that they display in their defence of the CAP. However, changes should be made to give our Channel fishermen a better deal. We should also be demanding a better deal for fishermen throughout the United Kingdom.

Following the Minister's excellent lead, let me hurry along without too many interventions to talk about the proposed TACs for 1989. First, trying to be even-handed in what I have to say about TACs and quotas, I am pleased that the United Kingdom vessels will be able to harvest 2,700 tonnes of west Greenland cod. I should declare a family interest since I have a brother who is the mate of a freezer trawler and that may give him some employment. Naturally, I am pleased about that, but why he wants to go fishing in those dreadful waters God alone knows.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): The hon. Gentleman has a better paid job.

Dr. Godman: I am the fair-weather fisherman in the family.

As the Parliamentary Secretary says, that figure, in one of these infernal numberless documents, represents an increase of about 200 per cent. Will he give an assurance that that Greenland catch will be equitably shared among those vessels which have the safety provisions to fish those harsh waters? There should be a fair share of that Greenland catch.

Another sensible proposal referred to by the Minister and contained in another of the documents is the introduction, for the first half of 1989, of a mesh size of 120 mm for the beam trawlers. Despite the problems to which the Minister referred, that is a good proposal and it should enable the growth of the depleted spawning stock.

There is precious little else to commend in the documents. For those fishermen who harvest North sea haddock and cod, the prospects are exceedingly bleak. As Mr. Robert Allen, the chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, has recently observed:

> "There is no doubt that the latest scientific advice about the state of the North Sea haddock and cod fisheries is extremely pessimistic and, as fishermen with a vital stake in the future well-being of these stocks, we have to take cognizance of this and be prepared to discuss the relevant conservation issues in proper and reasoned consultation with our scientists."

Mr. Richard Banks of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation has also expressed serious reservations about the proposed TACs. It appears that the United Kingdom fleet faces the dismal prospect of a fishing quota of 46,000 tonnes of haddock compared with 128,000 tonnes in the current year, and for 55,000 tonnes of cod compared with this year's total of 71,000 tonnes. Those are wild and dismal fluctuations from one year to another, which is unscientific.

Fishermen must adhere to the needs of fisheries management and must listen to what the scientists have to say. Our fishermen acknowledge the need to do so and are not as avaricious as, for example, Japanese whalers. They will listen to scientists' warnings and predictions, but sometimes I think of such utterances and statements as being as elegant, accurate and precise as an old side-trawler staggering and wallowing through the Pentland Firth in a force eight gale. I believe that is how such statements are viewed by many fishermen.

Scientific assessments of the state of valuable fishing stocks should be examined in a tough-minded and realistic way. Current scientific dependence on precautionary TACs are an example of what I mean. They are based on guesswork and not on rigorous analysis of the fishing stocks. Again I quote Mr. Allen:

> "If there is no change in the proposed agreement terms on cod and haddock, the Scottish white fish fleet will be faced with the prospect of a prolonged programme of tie-ups in 1989."

Both the SSF and the NFFO have expressed fears that a drastic reduction in the domestic catch will encourage Icelanders to send even more fish to the United Kingdom. That view is shared by the Grampian regional council. A letter from its chief executive that I received yesterday informs me:

> "With the threatened serious reduction in home supplies of fresh fish in 1989 the case for better control of Icelandic imports appears overwhelming. The Council trust that Government will be able to secure a formula, in collaboration with the EEC, which allows in sufficient supplies to keep the processing industry active, but at a price that does not further depress the earnings of the British catching fleet."

I say to the Minister who will be winding up this debate that, as part of such a formula, it might be worth while examining with the Icelandic Government the possibility of resuming British fishing activity in Icelandic waters. I know the Icelanders well, and as they are overwhelmingly dependent on fish, I have the idea that they will refuse to discuss such an innovation. However, raising the subject will at least show them that the House and the Government are deeply concerned about Icelandic imports and their effect on the livelihoods not only of fishermen but of those working in ancillary industries.

I do not want to keep the Minister too busy, but I have another question to ask. I remind him that, in agriculture, overproduction has led to a plethora of remedies, one of which is the set-aside scheme. With their savage cuts in the fishing effort, it seems that the Government are agreeing to a fishing set-aside scheme. Are they currently considering proposals for a fisheries set-aside? If so, fishermen should surely receive the same sympathy that is extended to hard-pressed farmers; why should fishermen be treated differently? Do the Government have any such proposals —I nearly said, on the stocks?

In truth, too many fishermen are pursuing too few fish. That is acknowledged throughout the Community, with the exception of the French and the Spanish. Recently, it was conceded by the Danish fisheries Minister, Lars Gammelgaard, in a speech he made in Esbjerg, that

> "The Danish fishing fleet is too large in relation to the amount of fish it is permitted to catch."

That problem is shared throughout the Community. He added that at the beginning of 1987, fishing vessel tonnage amounted to 136,000 gross registered tonnage but it had since been reduced to about 127,000 GRT at present, and predicted a fall by the end of 1989 to 117,000 GRT. That is very different from the British experience.

In that regard, the British Government failed to act decisively. In the task of matching the fishing fleet's capacity to the viability of the fish stock, they have been incompetent.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Godman: No, I shall follow the Minister's exemplary lead.

How will the Government meet their obligations to the multi-annual guidance programme for 1987-91? Is it not the case that, in the absence of a fair and reasonable decommissioning scheme, the United Kingdom fishing fleet will remain at its present level? In his latest annual report, the chairman of the Sea Fish Industry Authority comments:

> "Expansion was the 1987 theme for the UK fleet. By the end of December it had 1,951 vessels of 40 ft and over."

Elsewhere in the same report, he observed:

> "Ageing continued to be a problem, with more vessels crossing the 26-year-old threshold. At 646 boats, this total increased by 68. Almost two-thirds of Northern Ireland's boats were in this category."

That means that instead of there being a noticeable reduction in the fleet's capacity there has been an increase. We are heading in the wrong direction.

Is it not the case that, if the Government are to honour their obligations, they must implement a reduction in fleet capacity in excess of 11 per cent. before the end of 1991? If so, how will it be achieved—by natural wastage, or by tying up ships because of the savage TAC reductions?

We supported the Merchant Shipping Act 1984 which sought, among other things, to reduce the number of Spanish-based vessels fishing under United Kingdom quotas. We were happy to support the Secretary of State in that respect, but unfortunately that sensible Act has been challenged in the European Court and certain sections may have to be repealed. In addition to removing vessels that are not engaged in fishing, the Government must reintroduce a decommissioning scheme.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): On decommissioning grants, is my hon. Friend aware that when those grants were given before they were given exclusively to owners and that the fishermen who served on the vessels received nothing? There has been pressure on the Government to provide some form of compensation; one is only talking about 3,000 or so individuals. Does my hon. Friend agree that some cases have been outstanding for five or six years and have not been heard by the courts? There is terrific concern and a feeling of betrayal—certainly in the port of Hull. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a good thing for the Minister, with his new responsibilities, to talk to his counterpart in the Department of Employment and ascertain whether a political decision can be made to solve a problem that has existed for many years?

Dr. Godman: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. Of course, he is absolutely right: the trawler owners who received decommissioning grants did fantastically well out of them. The owner of the Pict received over £500,000, in addition to the £500,000 or so that he received in construction grant. The owners laughed all the way to the bank, but the fishermen were treated very badly.

In the short run, the Government must do all in their power to mitigate the appalling effects of the severe reductions in the 1989 North sea catch figures for haddock and cod. The Minister must reduce the effects of the cuts by referring to The Hague preference, which limits the reductions imposed on United Kingdom fishermen if they lead to social and financial difficulties. The imposition of The Hague preference in regard to haddock should mean that the TAC should not go below 60,000 tonnes for

[Dr. Godman]

United Kingdom fishermen. Even that is an appalling reduction, but I think that the industry would survive such a drastic measure, and I should be grateful for such a commitment from the Minister.

I hope that the clearing banks involved in the fishing industry will act sensibly and sympathetically towards their fishermen clients, who do not need harassment from the banks at this time.

The industry itself has offered radical solutions to the problems bedevilling the Government and the catching sector. They include the acceptance of a tighter licensing scheme which would involve the licensing of all bona fide fishing vessels, including those with an overall length of less than 10 metres. The Government must also reintroduce a fair and reasonable decommissioning scheme that will encourage older fishermen with aging vessels to leave the industry in a sensible way. They deserve no less from the Government and from the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): There is a great deal of interest in the motion, and in the best interests of all concerned I hope that hon. Members will respond to my appeal for short speeches.

5.42 pm

Sir Michael Shaw (Scarborough): I will do my best to follow your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is only fair to all those who wish to speak.

I agree with much of what the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) has said about the worries that beset our fishermen. That is not surprising, because they are well known and I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's knowledgeable interest in the subject.

Our views are voiced out of concern for the fishermen. I speak on behalf of the inshore fishing fleet of Scarborough and Whitby. Despite all the worries, there is still a great respect for my right hon. Friend the Minister, and an understanding that he is doing his best in very difficult circumstances. My local fishermen are also grateful to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for having taken the trouble to meet them personally as soon as he took office. That was much appreciated.

My hon. Friend will have discovered the deep concern that was felt, particularly about North sea cod quotas. In 1985 the quota was 250,000 tonnes; last year it was 160,000, and this year the Commission's proposed quota —as recommended by the international scientists—was down to 124,000, a further drop of some 22·5 per cent. That is bound to create serious difficulties, which I hope will not be made worse by late announcements of quotas for the various parts of the country. I know that that will depend on how quickly the figures are available.

That latest quota reduction will cause my local fishermen real hardship. I have always said, and I still believe, that the Community agreement had to be reached: even if we had not been in the Community there would still have had to be an agreement with the countries bordering on the North sea. But, having reached that good agreement at the outset, we must ask whether the quota system is working. Many fishermen feel that it is not, and that unfairnesses are creeping in. I do not think that there are any deliberate unfairnesses, but the exact methods of calculation must be explained as fully as possible so that there are no more mysteries about the results.

The truth is that there are simply not enough fish in the North sea for everyone to catch as many as they want, but perhaps we can find a close season for spawning. I understand that there are difficulties, but we finally managed to arrange a close season and a ban on herring fishing off the Yorkshire coast. More particularly, is it not possible to find a close area for the "nurseries" so that the young fish can grow and there is a better catch in the long run? That idea seems to have a good deal of support among local fishermen.

Are other factors, perhaps environmental or biological, involved in the absence of sufficient fish? I have made some inquiries, and I do not believe that there are enough facts to make that theory believable. One or two fishermen, however, have raised it in connection with the quality of fish that they are catching.

I know that the Minister is doing his best despite great difficulties, and I hope that the local fishermen will find that they can pull through despite the new and greater restriction imposed on them. If quotas are reduced and fishermen's livelihoods are made more difficult, it is even more important that the conditions under which they fish and the port facilities should be the very best that can be made available.

If fishermen are obliged to catch fewer fish, it is important that the fish that they are allowed to catch should be of the highest quality that can command the highest price. The port and handling facilities, the arrangements with the processors and the marketing of fish should be brought completely up to date. Scarborough and Whitby want all the help that they can get. They are going through a difficult time.

I wish my right hon. Friend every success in the negotiations. Our good wishes go with him. I hope that he will fight as strenuously as I know he has fought in the past to ensure that further quotas are obtained for those who fish for cod in the North sea.

5.51 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I welcome the opportunity of this debate in advance of the meeting of the Council of Ministers which is to be held on 12 December. It will help the Minister to understand how anxious hon. Members on both sides of the House are about the drastic cuts in the total allowable catch, particularly those for cod and haddock. I had thought that the presence of the Secretary of State for Scotland on the Treasury Bench showed that at last he had begun to take an interest in the fishing industry, but unfortunately he has gone.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wallace: No, I do not intend to give way.

These cuts in the total allowable catch, particularly of haddock, in Scotland will have a devastating effect on the economy and on the communities who live around the Scottish coast. It will have as devastating an effect on those communities as, for example, the redundancies that have been announced at Bishopton. That is the relative scale of the problem. It is regrettable that the Scottish Office

Minister who usually answers questions about fishery matters in this House has not bothered to turn up for the debate.

I have already referred to the savage reductions in the TAC, particularly of haddock, which could lead to a £40 million withdrawal of income from the fishing industry. Many people might argue that the fishing industry is overreaching itself and that it does not have the interests of conservation at heart. Fishermen realise, however—perhaps more than anybody else—how important conservation is to the long-term interests of the industry. They know that tomorrow's short-term easy gain jeopardises the long-term benefits to the industry.

It is also important to point out that the TAC for haddock in all but one of the last five years has been no higher than that recommended by the scientists, and that in none of those years has the catch been higher than the TAC. When it was announced last year that there was to be an increase in the TAC for haddock, many people in the fishing industry queried the wisdom of that increase. Therefore, they have every right, when such a savage decrease is announced, to query its wisdom also.

There is something very wrong with the way in which the TACs are set. Such wild fluctuations from one year to another do not allow the industry to develop against a stable background. For that reason the Minister must grasp the importance and seriousness of the proposals, particularly those relating to haddock and cod. Their effects will be serious. Boats could be laid up, with devastating implications for the communities concerned. There will be a knock-on effect on the fish processing industry. The industry stands to lose £40 million on its haddock catch, but the loss of income to the processing side of the industry could be very much more and that would also affect the fishing communities.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) asked about The Hague preference. When I sought to intervene during the Minister's speech, that was the very point that I intended to put to him. It would have been useful if the Minister could have told us whether he intends to raise the question of The Hague preference when he goes to the Council of Ministers' meeting on 12 December.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Hague preference was raised at the last meeting of the Council of Ministers. It will be raised again at the next meeting. I shall deal with that matter in my speech.

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to the Minister for making that clear. It is useful to know that The Hague preference will be raised by Her Majesty's Government at the meeting on 12 December.

I understand that The Hague preference sets a bottom line limit of 60,000 tonnes of haddock. If the agreed amount for the whole of the North sea, shared between the EEC and Norway, is 68,000 tonnes and Norway gets its share, and if we allow for any industrial by-catch, that leaves about 1,500 tonnes to be shared among all the other EEC countries. That being the case, is the Minister able to deliver on The Hague preference? If he is not prepared to give the House an assurance that he can deliver on The Hague preference, is he prepared to say that he is willing to open up again the agreement on the 68,000 tonnes between the EEC and Norway and to renegotiate that amount? We must know the answer to that question if the fishing industry is to be reassured. Even 60,000 tonnes represents a very serious decrease in the total allowable catch for the current year. It will put enormous strains on the industry.

The Minister may say that he will seek a mid-year review. I suppose that that would be better than nothing, but it would still put enormous strains on the industry. It would have to look forward to working during the first six months under tight constraints and with no real expectation of an increase. We want more than just the possibility of a mid-year review.

The Minister referred to fishing for mackerel east of 4 deg west. He knows that that is important to my constituency. He referred to the agreement that has been reached with the Norwegians and to the number of occasions on which Her Majesty's Government had suggested at Council of Ministers' meetings that there should be flexibility. He also said that an agreement had been reached with Norway for the forthcoming year. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will say why he thinks that there will be even greater prospects in 1989 of the United Kingdom being able to achieve agreement with her EEC partners on flexibility.

I have received representations from my hon. Friend the Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) about the cod quota for the United Kingdom as it affects fishermen in Devon and Cornwall, particularly those who can fish only inshore. They feel that the United Kingdom quota should be increased to take account of the fishing needs of that area. I should welcome the Minister's comments on that point.

When does the Minister expect a decision on the current licensing review? If the fishing industry is expected to reduce its capacity this year by 16 per cent., by how much more is the industry to be asked to reduce its capacity by the EEC to take account of lower total allowable catches? That fear must be in the hearts and minds of those who are engaged in the fishing industry. This Bench and the industry never had much confidence in the previous licensing system as an effective means of conservation. I look forward to the Parliamentary Secretary saying when we can expect an announcement about the Government's proposals for a future licensing system.

The Minister showed remarkable complacency. It cannot be denied that in recent years the income of the fishing industry has gone up, but the Minister cannot stand at the Dispatch Box and say that the common fisheries policy is working well when in 1988 the haddock TAC shoots up, and in 1989 it shoots down. Something is fundamentally wrong, and it is sheer complacency for the Minister to say that all is well.

6 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): The purpose of the debate, coming just before the annual meeting of the Fisheries Council, is really to gauge the feeling of fishermen around our coasts. I follow the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) quite often, and I am always struck by the fact that there is almost a uniformity of opinion among fishermen, be they from my part of the world in the far south-west of the United Kingdom or from his part of the world in Orkney and Shetland. Let me acknowledge straight away that fishermen in the south-west do not face the cuts that face fishermen in the

[Mr. David Harris]

North sea. However, one has to recognise that cuts or pressures on one species or one area often have a knock-on effect on other species and in other areas.

Although in his concluding remarks the hon. Gentleman was somewhat critical of my right hon. Friend, no Minister, whatever his attitude—and we have an excellent Minister in my right hon. Friend—can create fish when there are no fish. We all have to acknowledge that the catching capacity of the United Kingdom fleet has increased dramatically, as have the catching capacities of the fleets of other nations in the European Community. Unfortunately, fish stocks in general have not increased by anything like the same amount, and in some species stocks have decreased. That is a problem we face today.

Because of those factors there has undoubtedly been a marked change in attitudes expressed in the debate and the attitudes of fishermen in the past few years. In the past couple of years this debate has been quite optimistic. Everyone has recognised that the fishing fleet has done pretty well. In the past 12 months, there has been a change in mood.

A couple of weeks ago, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State was good enough to come to a Committee Room and meet representatives of fishermen of Devon and Cornwall and hon. Members representing Devon and Cornwall. I am sure that it was clear to him that a change of mood has taken place this year. I am glad to say that he is coming to Newlyn in my constituency on Monday and I believe that he is going on to Brixham in Devon later that day. The fishermen there will have an opportunity to tell my hon. Friend exactly what they feel. I suspect that the Minister will have a robust meeting because the mood has changed and the unease which existed perhaps even a year ago has now given way to deep disquiet, and, among some fishermen, to anger.

The concern of those fishing the waters off south-west Cornwall and Devon has centred largely on cod, which appears to be in some abundance. The quotas are not fixed on precise scientific evidence or data—although I share the views of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) about some of the attitudes of scientists. However, the cod quota is certainly based on a precautionary TAC. The evidence faced by the fishermen does not bear out the thinking behind that precautionary TAC and the quotas that stem from it.

For historical reasons, the United Kingdom quota for cod in the Channel is very low compared with the extremely large French quota, and that is a constant source of anger. There is nothing worse for a fisherman than to catch fish, sometimes by accident, and because the quota has been exceeded or because a stop has been put on catching, to have to throw those fish back. I believe that that is one of the main sources of anger felt by many fishermen in Devon and Cornwall today.

If one word can sum up the hopes of many fishermen in Cornwall and Devon, it is "flexibility". We do not like it, but we realise that it is difficult to get larger increases in quota. We have had a small increase this year and we hope that the Minister will press for a larger quota for Channel cod in particular. I was a Member of the European Parliament for five years and am aware of the constraints involved for any Minister in negotiating quotas with our partners in the European Community. Frankly, sometimes there has to be horse trading, and that cannot always be easy.

I am convinced that better management of the existing quota for cod in the Channel is not only possible but absolutely necessary and that there is a greater need for flexibility in the management of that quota. I urge my right hon. Friend to consider that point.

Time is pressing, so I shall mention just a couple of other issues. First, the mackerel box fortunately has not been a great matter of contention between me, as an hon. Member representing the south-west, and Scottish Members, as it has been in the past. Without trying to provoke a row, I must say as gently and as nicely as I can that I utterly reject the views of one Scottish fisherman reported in *Fishing News* who claimed that the mackerel box, the conservation area for mackerel off the south-west coast, was a political box. It is not. It is a genuine conservation measure to safeguard and protect the juvenile mackerel which are found off the south-west coast.

Frankly, I should like some relaxation of the box if, and only if, that were possible within the framework of conservation. I am dreadfully conscious that the few processors in the south-west are feeling the very marked effect of the box on their activities. If it were possible to have a small local fishery without driving a coach and horses through the conservation aspects of the box, nothing would give me greater pleasure than for a local fishery to be opened, but we cannot afford to have the Klondikers back in the box servicing a bigger fishery, as that would be a dreadful mistake.

I now turn to a theme which I have raised in every fisheries debate since I entered the House and at every opportunity in the European Parliament—the scourge and the scandal of the Spanish flag of convenience. I am very pleased indeed that, as my right hon. Friend has said, on this very day the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 comes into force. We hope that its provisions will deal once and for all with the scandal, and will result in the Spanish boats being taken off our register so that they no longer fish against our quotas to the detriment of our own fishermen. I hope and pray that that will be the outcome of that piece of legislation.

However, putting legislation on the statute book is not enough. It also requires application to ensure that the legislation is implemented. My earnest plea to my right hon. Friend, and through him to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport who has the duty of implementing that legislation, is that strenuous attempts should be made to rid our register of the Spanish boats which have caused so much harm to our fishing industry. How we have put up with it for so long is really beyond my comprehension. If he gets rid of the boats, in a year of uncertainty, disquiet and even anger among our fishermen, that will be one really positive step forward.

The Minister has a difficult task at the Fisheries Council. I know that he will fight for British fishermen. He knows that behind him is the feeling in the industry that I have tried to describe, and I urge him to remember that when he attends the Fisheries Council meeting.

6.10 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I shall focus on one area in the interaction between the Government and the Commission—one that belies the claim in the motion that the Government will negotiate fishing opportunities "consistent with the requirements of conservation of stocks." I refer to the Government's failure to prevent the moratorium on FEOGA assistance for the construction of fishing vessels in the United Kingdom. If we are to develop fishing opportunities consistent with the conservation of stocks, we should think about building up fleets that are undercapitalised, work with old and small boats and pursue stocks that could withstand larger catches. They are not pressure stocks. One example of that is the fleet in my constituency, and the same is true of many areas in the west of Scotland. The moratorium has hit such fleets especially hard and unfairly.

I say "unfairly" because the moratorium was a consequence of the general catching overcapacity of the United Kingdom fleet this year. The fleet in the Western Isles does not contribute to that overcapacity. It pursues nethrops, lobsters and crabs, which could easily withstand an expansion of catching capacity. Stocks of lobsters and crabs would benefit from more catching capacity. It is unfair that those fleets should have been so affected, and the responsibility for it lies squarely with the Government.

Earlier this year I visited Brussels to talk to people in the fisheries directorate of the European Commission to discover the thinking behind the moratorium and to see whether an exception could be made for the boats that do not affect overall capacity. That was impossible, but the clear message that I received was that the moratorium had been imposed reluctantly. It was imposed because of the Government's failure to meet the capacity agreement that they had reached, and their clear failure to give any practical signs that they were serious about resolving the problem of overcapacity.

An important short-term measure could be the introduction of decommissioning grants. The EC would be more than helpful in setting up a scheme. It is not good enough for the Government to decline to consider their introduction on the basis that the previous scheme was not used and did not work well. The failure of the earlier scheme was entirely the fault of the Government, and the use of the failure as an excuse not to proceed with the scheme now greatly compounds the Government's overall failings.

The Government's responsibility is clear. The problems have hit many fishermen who, using their limited capital, have made plans to develop their boats and fleets, with the assistance of the EC. The Government's failure to resolve the problem has cut their legs from under them. It is incumbent on the Government to pursue all possible solutions to the problems, especially of the fishermen who were caught out this year.

May I make one suggestion in relation to fishermen who had applied for FEOGA assistance this year but who were not even considered for such assistance? Some of them were on their last application for FEOGA assistance, and I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to urge upon the EC the possibility of fishermen whose cases were not heard this year having their applications rolled over into next year. Those fishermen do not pursue pressure stocks and work with small boats. They desperately need the capital. It is not fair that their applications, whose merits have not been heard because of the Government's failure to resolve the problem, should fall by the wayside.

I apologise to the Front Bench spokesmen for the fact that I shall not be here for the closing speeches because I must be elsewhere. I hope to return to the Chamber later tonight.

6.18 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I support the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) in saying that we cannot allow the problem of fishermen's compensation to go away. I urge my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to do what he can to persuade his colleagues in the Department of Employment to consider these matters once the latest court cases have been dealt with.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) that a difficult year lies ahead and that we must take every opportunity to use the facilities that are available to our fishermen.

The extensive documents involved in the proposals make for difficult reading and illustrate one of my main points: that too many bureaucratic regulations have a detrimental effect on our fishermen. I urge my hon. Friends to call for greater simplicity and a more straightforward approach. I hope that my plea is heard not only by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, but in Brussels.

There is little doubt that complications in obtaining licences and transferring licences from one vessel to another, to say nothing of their intrinsic value, regardless of which vessel they are attached to, make life difficult for skippers and vessel owners. Therefore, I should like to see flexibility in the interpretation of the regulations and their enactment to take into account the difficult position in which individual fishermen find themselves.

In that context, I thank my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for the way in which he recently dealt with a problem arising from the transfer of a licence from one vessel to that of a fisherman in Fleetwood in my constituency. The solution was satisfactory, and it was a correct interpretation of the regulations used sensibly.

I thank my hon. Friend also for taking the time recently to visit Fleetwood and to see at first hand the state of the fishing industry in that port today compared with what it was like many years ago. There is little doubt that, on the west coast and elsewhere, the industry needs all the support it can get from his Department to ensure that it remains viable within the context of the European community's fishing regime.

During his visit, my hon. Friend was interested in the initiatives that had been shown by the local council—the Wyre borough council—in setting up the fish dock management company, which is already taking steps to make the port of Fleetwood a better port and, in particular, improve facilities in the Channel. Another initiative is being taken by the council and by Associated British Ports to widen the scope of activities in the port of Fleetwood, in particular to build a marina.

I am keen to see at least one scheme that is already on the drawing board go ahead as soon as possible. The borough council and I want a scheme to be chosen that has in mind the interests of the fishing industry. Such a development has potential not only further to improve navigation and port facilities but to reduce the cost base of

[Mr. Keith Mans]

fishing activities out of that port—that is important—and, in so doing, make fishermen operating out of Fleetwood more able to compete with fishing fleets from countries abroad. There is little doubt that such developments will result in more employment both within the industry and elsewhere in the local community.

I stress the importance of one aspect, and that is stability within the quota system, as far as that is possible, bearing in mind the points that my right hon. Friend the Minister made earlier. Obviously, fishermen recognise the need for restraints on their activities to maintain fish stocks. They find it hard to understand the wide fluctuations that take place in their quotas almost from month to month. Additionally, the lateness in the year when provisional quotas are turned into firm quotas causes hardship.

As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary knows, as late as September, the 1988 provisional quota for one skipper in my constituency was reduced by nearly 20 per cent., which effectively meant that he had to stop fishing. I sincerely hope that, in future, we can avoid that circumstance.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend is taking such a close interest in fishing activities in Fleetwood and elsewhere. I urge him to continue to fight for simple, understandable regulations based on relatively stable, flexibly enforced quotas.

6.23 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am sorry that the Minister is no longer in the Chamber, as the burden of my remarks about the financial state of the fishing industry would leave him under no misapprehension at all. The Parliamentary Secretary will have to act as a substitute for the time being. I, too, detected a note of substantial complacency in the opening speech.

Fishing income depends on four factors: quantities, prices, interest rates and fuel costs. Already, two of those four vital factors are extremely adverse for the industry. I refer to the high level of interest rates and the low level of prices. My constituency has the largest concentration of white fish landings in Europe, never mind the United Kingdom.

I have a bundle of letters addressed to the Prime Minister. For the benefit of the Parliamentary Secretary, I shall read extracts from two of them. All constituents' letters are important, but those letters are particularly important because they say something not only about the financial state of the industry but about the character of the industry in Scotland. Our fishing industry is not composed of a small number of people or companies with extremely large boats. The fish-catching industry in Scotland is composed of small family-run businesses, share ownership, and people who work for those businesses.

One letter is from a young skipper's wife in Fraserburgh, who writes:

"The industry merits recognition but we feel that it has largely been neglected. What will happen when our men can no longer meet their bank interest payments and the banks start to repossess the boats, which no one will want to buy because they are no longer viable? The N.E."—

of Scotland—

"will be left with a fleet of useless vessels and our livelihood will be gone. I won't go into lengthy personal details, but suffice to say that because my husband is struggling to maintain his bank interest payments on the boat I am not receiving enough to manage my household accounts etc. The fishing is the only way of life we know and there is little else in Fraserburgh for our men to do. We don't want to be wealthy, all we want is to be able again to manage."

I have another letter from a group of fishermen's wives in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing):

"Our husbands are hunters—hunters of vital food supplies to a nation, hunters who must work in dangerous conditions and who must leave the comfort of their homes and the company of their families for long periods with the knowledge now that even 16 days at sea no longer secures even a living wage."

There are many other examples in my correspondence. I shall take the liberty of sending that correspondence to the Parliamentary Secretary.

I refer to small businesses that are already facing extremely adverse economic circumstances in the last six months of this year. They involve people who have invested and modernised and are now facing penal interest rates. We cannot blame the Parliamentary Secretary for the misguided policies that are pursued by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but we should have the answer to the questions. What possible benefit can there be for the United Kingdom economy to have interest rates at a level that will bankrupt vital fishing businesses? What possible merit can there be in driving out share-owned fishing businesses?

The focal point of the correspondence that I have received is Icelandic imports. People in the fishing industry strongly believe that such imports are undermining prices in the home market and are coming in at below reference prices. The research that I have been able to do suggests that the central problem is the grading system. Surely it must be looked at by the Parliamentary Secretary. Even in my limited research, I have been able to uncover examples of imported fish presently coming in at under reference prices. Therefore, it is with some surprise that I see no sign of Government action.

According to the Sea Fish Industry Authority's trade bulletin, the latest figures were released in September. That is a scandal. How can the Government possibly monitor developments in fish imports if the latest statistics are two months old? In imports of frozen fish from non-EEC countries there are three categories, one of cod and two of saithe, for which the average price quoted in the bulletin is lower than the reference price.

For example, the average price of other cod is £709 a tonne. The reference price is £869 a tonne. What is the Parliamentary Secretary going to do about this? Why is he not invoking the countervailing measures that are open to him, or going to the Commission to ask for countervailing action against these imports? Even on this dated evidence —there is every reason to believe that things have deteriorated since—imports are undermining the home market.

I take it that the Government realise that, if effective action against non-EEC imports is not taken, as is allowed in the Commission regulations, we face the prospect, with the quotas announced in these documents, of having the home-produced product further compressed, with the price not responding because of the flood of imports from Iceland and elsewhere. That would be the most serious position of all for the fishing industry.

I repeat the question asked by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). The Iceland Government and people have every right to conserve their natural resources as they see fit, but it is for our Government, and other EEC Governments, to monitor and protect against the penetration into the EEC market from Icelandic imports. The Icelandic Government cannot have the bun and the penny. They cannot both secure their own natural resource and demand complete access to EEC markets. What will the Parliamentary Secretary do about the clear evidence that Icelandic imports are undermining the home market and are the cause of the collapse in prices that we have seen over the past three months?

As a means of control of fishery, the TACs are an extremely blunt instrument, as blunt as interest rates as a means of controlling the national economy. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has made a number of strong points to me and other Members, but one of the strongest is that we have enforced the recommended quotas for the past five years for both cod and haddock, and that on only one occasion—and that marginal—have the landings exceeded those quotas, imposed as a result of the original scientific advice given to the Community. Why is it, then, if TACs are an effective way to manage fishing stocks, that we now face a crisis in cod and a disaster in haddock?

To set TACs impossibly low risks the danger of a perverse effect because of the likelihood of increasing the number of discards. The Government will have to re-examine the management of fisheries to see whether TACs by themselves are effectively controlling fishing. Surely the fishing industry has to be controlled by effective management of capacity and the enforcement of protection for the spawning stock. It is not adequate for the Government to say that, just because the last decommissioning scheme was a national scandal, that is a reason not to have another. That is a reason for having a fair and honest decommissioning scheme and not repeating the mistakes of a few years ago.

The main point for Scottish Members in this debate is the dramatic and catastrophic decline suggested for the haddock TAC. I am sure that even the Parliamentary Secretary needs no reminding—if he did need reminding he would have to cope with the lack of a Minister from the Scottish Office to give him that reminder—that haddock is the mainstay of the Scottish fleet. It is the dominant species both by quality and by value. The proposed cut of 62 per cent. will strike at the heart of the Scottish fishing industry.

I have been looking at the Community documents and the documents presented to the House on this subject, because I, too, am interested in the "Hague resolutions" and what practical effect they can have on our difficulties. What is interesting is not just the meeting in The Hague in late October 1976, or the Council resolutions published on 3 November that year, but what was said to the House of Commons in the explanatory memorandum that was presented with these EEC documents.

The Foreign Office was negotiating the rights of Scottish and other United Kingdom fisheries, and it was painting a reassuring picture. The House of Commons was assured that

> "the need to maintain the level of employment and income in coastal regions which are economically disadvantaged and largely dependent on fishing"

was one of the three main thrusts of the embryo common fisheries policy, which was being discussed. It was made clear that the vital needs of fishing communities in Ireland, northern Britain, and Greenland would be protected in the application of the common fisheries policy. It was also made clear that the Commission was thinking of further assistance to fishing regions, such as money from the European Investment Bank, or from the regional fund or the social fund. That is money that, incidentally, the north-east of Scotland has long been deprived of because of the Government's own regional policy.

It was said that the vital needs of northern Britain would be protected in the application of the common fisheries policy. We want to hear from the Parliamentary Secretary how these vital needs will be protected and whether the "Hague preference" and commitment will be redeemed. What does it mean in practice? Does it mean that the first 60,000 tonnes will be available for northern Britain to fish as part of the haddock quota? What guarantee has the House that that is his aim and intention, and that he intends to secure that 60,000 tonnes when he goes to the negotiations in Brussels? Will he give us a guarantee that, if that 60,000 tonnes is not forthcoming, he will renegotiate what has already been negotiated? As has been pointed out, even 60,000 tonnes would be a disastrously low figure for the Scottish fleet.

It is ironic that, only a few months ago, the Secretary of State was making a speech in Europe on Saturday 7 May, which was headed:

> "CFP brings stability and prosperity".

The fishing industry in Scotland, and the documents that we are discussing, do not promise stability and prosperity. The talk in the fishing industry in Scotland is of viability and survival. I suggest that the Secretary of State changes not only his speechwriter but the method by which, and the vigour with which, he pursues the defence of Scottish fishing interests in Brussels. I welcome the Minister back to our proceedings. Unless we hear from the Parliamentary Secretary that he will take positive and fighting action to defend the vital needs of the Scottish fishing industry, we shall have no hesitation in dividing the House on these documents.

6.37 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): It is not my intention to speak on many of the technical issues raised in the debate, which have been dealt with adequately by my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and by many other hon. Members representing constituencies all over the United Kingdom. It is appropriate that I speak as a woman representing a fishing constituency, because my hon. Friend read out letters from the wives of many of our skippers and fishermen in Banff and Buchan and Moray. Many of these people are my personal friends, while others are constituents whom I do not know. This much I do know: they are women who are committed to the work that their husbands undertake. They are aware of the dangers and adversity that they face. They are not people who complain. It shows the depths of concern within our communities that the wives of our fishermen are at the stage of writing to the Prime Minister to state their views and to ask for assistance.

The fishing industry is not composed of people who belong to a breed of moaners. The fishermen do not come begging, time after time, for assistance. They are men who work against adversity. They are used to the difficulties of the industry, but the situation is now so critical that positive action to assist our communities is necessary. The fishermen in my constituency have put it to me firmly that they see the situation now as being worse than that which

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

preceded the famous blockade in the 1970s in the north-east of Scotland. That surely must bring home to the Minister the strength of feeling among our people.

When women write to us, they are conscious of the investment made in the fishing industry by individuals, families and shareholders in our small communities. Boats now cost well into six figures; in some cases, it costs £1 million to buy a new boat. Mention is made of the possibility of tying up some of those boats, but the men cannot afford to tie up their boats because they are staring financial ruin in the face. They have to keep working to pay the interest and to ensure that the boat can continue to go to sea.

Many of the fathers in my constituency are now being asked for advice by their sons who want to follow in the family tradition of owning a boat, going to sea and making their living through the fishing industry. Those fathers are now placed in the impossible position of saying, "I would not advise you at this stage to contemplate coming into the fishing industry" because everything seems to be loaded against them. Prices have plummeted and it is now possible that we shall not have catches that make it worthwhile going to sea. There have been problems with licences and lack of grants for our fishermen. The whole quota situation needs to be reconsidered because of the difficulties experienced. That is the atmosphere in our small fishing communities in the north-east of Scotland and I am sure that it is reflected in other such communities round the coast.

Those communities need people to fight on their behalf. They deserve people arguing on their behalf at the Commission in Brussels. It is not good enough to say that The Hague preference will be put on the table. We want to know what kind of a muscle will be used to ensure that it is implemented. Here I echo the point of view of my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan that we need a satisfactory response and, if we do not receive one, we shall press the matter to a Division.

We do not want to see the heart torn out of our communities. It is a matter not just of loss of jobs and earnings, but of the heart being torn out of our communities. We need action now and I hope that the Minister will argue most effectively on behalf of those women and fishermen.

6.41 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Donald Thompson): It has been a very good debate this evening and I have listened with interest to every word. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) apologises for being absent, as does the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark).

I work closely with my noble Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Where is he?

Mr. Thompson: He is in the other House.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): He does not exist.

Mr. Thompson: Let us get on with the debate. It is very important. The noble Lord spends a great deal of time and energy explaining the problems and advantages of Scotland to my right hon. Friend and myself. I resent the attacks made upon him, but will not take the matter further. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) started with a fierce attack, but I shall not comment on that further as I do not want to stray from the issue.

I wish to say a few words about the great wodge of papers that hon. Members have collected from the Vote Office. The figures are still emerging and Opposition Members have been telling us tonight that we must change the figures in those documents. The Scrutiny Committee has been most generous in its acceptance of the documents at the last minute so that this debate could take place in an orderly and proper manner. The Committee's generosity was also displayed when it referred in one of the documents to the helpful information given by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

That leads me to thank all hon. Members for their understanding of our desire to provide the documents so that they can make relevant and informed speeches, as they have done. That would not have been possible without a great deal of hard work and dedication from my officials and those of the Scottish Office who have brought these documents to our notice very quickly.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) referred to Channel cod and Icelandic fish, as did many other hon. Members. He asked about Greenland cod and whether we would do all we could to catch our total quota. I can assure him that we shall do our best to catch our total quota of Greenland cod this year, although we have not done so every year.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned scientific advice, as did other hon. Members. The scientific advice is the best advice that we have. As many hon. Members have said, the problem is that, in some respects, the advice fluctuates greatly. That does not give us a proper basis upon which to build an industry.

I fully understand the concerns of the hon. Members for Banff and Buchan and for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) who read us letters from their constituents. Those people may doubt the wisdom of scientific advice, but that advice, the quotas and the TACs are intended to protect not only the fishermen and their families, but their children's future.

As I have visited various fishing communities throughout the country, I have been impressed by the way in which various fishery committees and fishermen ask for greater conservation measures. I shall continue to visit those communities and, if I am invited by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, I shall come to Scotland too. I know that I shall be welcomed when I do. In Scarborough, for example, they are requesting a three-month moratorium on cod fishing. They also suggested an extension of boxes in which people could not fish, so that there could be conservation in the first three months of the year.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister is missing the point about the administration of the fishery by quotas alone. Surely, if he accepts that the scientific advice has by and large been followed over the past five years, that shows that the advice could not have been accurate during that time. The burden of managing the fishery cannot rest on quotas alone. Why do the Government refuse, for example, to introduce a decommissioning scheme?

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman has made his point twice. I shall not say that I was coming to it because I was in the middle of dealing with it, saying that there were other matters that we must consider, such as net sizes. The net size has been increased from 1 January 1988, but many fishermen contend that it has not been increased.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman wanted me to answer his questions, but I shall give way to him.

Mr. Kirkwood: The Minister appears to be arguing reasonable academic cases that will have to be addressed in the longer term. Everyone understands that, but he appears to have missed the point that there is no time left for some of those fishermen, particularly those fishing for haddock in constituencies such as mine, because they will not survive next year to take advantage of those decommissioning schemes.

Mr. Thompson: I intend to deal with decommissioning schemes and the money that we have spent over the past six years in commissioning and bringing the fleet up to date.

In response to the question by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow, I see no possibility at present of a set-aside scheme for fisheries. Quotas have gained the same sort of value in the hands of fishermen as have milk quotas in the hands of farmers. That means that the chance for decommissioning is most precarious. It will be difficult to draw up a sensible decommissioning scheme while, in many parts of the United Kingdom, licences are changing hands at inflated prices.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) spoke about the licensing of vessels under 10 m and I expected to hear more demands for their licensing. However, as soon as we license them—they seem to catch a small proportion of our fish—we immediately give a value to that licence, which would make it more difficult to introduce a decommissioning scheme.

Dr. Godman: Might it be the case that the measures outlined in the Ministry's consultation paper will ensure only that fishing capacity will stay around its present level? Is it the case that, by the end of 1991, the Government will have to bring about a reduction in the fleet of about 11 per cent.?

Mr. Thompson: It is right to bring about a reduction in the fleet of about 11 per cent. It is right to say that the only countries that are tackling the job at present are Denmark and Portugal. Under the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 we have given parliamentary time to tackling the job. The register has started today and we have had a favourable initial decision from the Advocate General which gives us hope that the policy will work. The quota-hoppers will then leave the fleet and we shall start to reduce it. We have held consultations and we must find positive ways to reduce capacity.

Before hon. Members become too impatient, I shall deal with The Hague convention. They will be pleased to know that we managed to raise the matter of The Hague convention at the last Council meeting in Belgium. *[Interruption.]* Let me get three sentences together. We did so under difficult circumstances. I understand the great anxieties of the people who want to fish at the same levels as last year.

Mr. Kirkwood: At viable levels.

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman asked for 60,000 tonnes—that is 22,000 tonnes less than last year. That is a viable level. If the hon. Gentleman wants to write that down, I shall read it out.

Mr. Home Robertson: I am intervening in case anybody feels it necessary to alter *Hansard's* record. There has been a spot of bother about that recently. Is the Minister talking about The Hague preference or The Hague convention? The two are very different.

Mr. Thompson: I am talking about The Hague preference. I shall fight for The Hague preference. We started to fight for it at the last Council meeting. I fully understand the importance that hon. Members give to the preference.

Mr. Salmond: What does the Minister mean by fighting for The Hague preference? Is he telling the House that he will accept nothing less than 60,000 tonnes of haddock and will he invoke The Hague preference to achieve that? If not, what will he do?

Mr. Thompson: I shall not tell the House how I intend to proceed. If I tell the House, I tell the Germans, Dutch, Danes, French and Italians how I intend to proceed. I have given hon. Members the assurances that they were seeking on this matter.

Mr. Wallace: I am not asking the Minister how he will go about the negotiations. I seek an assurance that at least 60,000 tonnes of haddock will be made available and that that will be the bottom line.

Mr. Thompson: I cannot give an absolute assurance.

Mr. Wallace: What is the status of the preference then?

Mr. Thompson: I shall argue about the status of the preference. The Hague preference must be argued about.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Minister understand that there is confusion among our sister European nations about our position? Haddock is an essential national resource in terms of the common fisheries policy for Scotland and the United Kingdom. We do not seem to be fighting our corner. If we did fight for a TAC for haddock, we should get support for that. From the Minister's tone this evening, I have the impression that he has no stomach for a fight.

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in his insinuations. I realise the value of the haddock stock and our European colleagues realise its value to us. We need a balance on all stocks throughout the United Kingdom. It has taken a year's hard negotiation to maintain the 4 deg west provision. I know of the difference between last year's quota and this year's.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister speculate on how the fisheries Minister of an independent Scottish Government might treat The Hague preference and the Scottish fishing industry's vital need for haddock? Would such a person treat it as a vital matter, or with the Minister's casual attitude?

Mr. Thompson: That is a hypothetical question.

Dr. Godman: This is a serious question. I must have an assurance on the supply of fish from Iceland and The

[Dr. Godman]

Hague preference. The Minister must assure the House that the Icelanders will not be able to exploit a reduction in the domestic catch of cod.

Mr. Thompson: I reiterate that the question put by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan was a hypothetical question.

The United Kingdom delegation, with my noble Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office sitting next to me, will fight as hard as anybody for Scottish rights. I was pleased that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow gave the House some figures about Icelandic cod. There are various technical difficulties about the figures and they must be seen over a period of time. If he sends me them, I shall look at them carefully.

We have no evidence to date that imports from Iceland were below the levels. It will be difficult to negotiate with the Icelanders about fish because their livelihood depends wholly on it.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 150, Noes 37.

Division No. 5] **[7 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Burt, Alistair
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'd)*
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gill, Christopher
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle and
Mr. Michael Fallon.

NOES

Allen, Graham
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Bennett, A. F. *(D'ntn & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cryer, Bob
Darling, Alistair
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Kirkwood, Archy
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Mowlam, Marjorie
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Salmond, Alex
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Vaz, Keith

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Andrew Welsh.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the Commission's amended proposals on total allowable catches and quotas for 1989 described in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum of 30th November 1988, European Community Document No. 9312/88 on total allowable catches and quotas for 1989, the Commission proposal on the 1989 Reciprocal Fisheries Agreement with Norway described in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum of 23rd November 1988, the Commission proposal on mesh sizes described in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum of 30th November 1988, European Community Document No. 9185/88 on fishery guide prices and of the Government's intention to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for the United Kingdom fishing industry for 1989 consistent with the requirements of conservation of stocks.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

It being Seven o'clock, and there being private business set down by THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS, *under Standing Order No. 7 (time for taking private business), further proceeding stood postponed.*

City of London (Spitalfields Market) Bill

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the City of London (Spitalfields Market) Bill may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the Bill shall be presented to the House not later than the seventh day after this day;

That there shall be depositied with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the last Session;

That the Bill shall be laid upon the Table of the House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be deemed to have been read the first and second time (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read) and shall be ordered to be read the third time;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.—*[The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

7.10 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): We are discussing what I think is called a revival motion. It is an effort to revive in this Session discussion of a Bill on which we have had a Second Reading debate in a previous Session. If the motion is passed, a badly designed Bill, which is damaging to the interests of the people of Spitalfields, will head towards the statute book. This is a good moment to halt its otherwise inevitable progress.

I hope that, at the end of the debate, my right hon. and hon. Friends will support me in the Division Lobby and oppose the Bill's revival. The Bill received a Second Reading on Thursday 12 May, after which it was sent to a Committee of the House, which had 10 substantial sittings. In Committee, the petitioners who had petitioned against the Bill were called and gave evidence. They put their case for not proceeding with the Bill.

I have read all of the Committee proceedings and have no complaint against the Committee. It conducted its hearings with admirable fairness and thoroughness. The Committee was sufficiently impressed by the evidence that it heard to require substantial amendments to be made to the section 52 agreement concluded by the City of London corporation and Tower Hamlets council as a condition of its approval of the Bill. I thank the Committee for that and congratulate the petitioners, especially those who spoke for the campaign to save Spitalfields from the developers, on putting the case of the bulk of residents of Spitalfields so persuasively and tenaciously.

Alas, the Committee could not respond to the petitioners' central point, which was that the Bill should not be proceeded with. The Committee could not respond to that request because the House had already given the Bill a Second Reading.

It falls to the House today to take up the issue again and, I hope, to decide not to proceed with the Bill. I am sure that the people of Spitalfields would be glad if the House decided not to proceed with the Bill, which is narrowly drawn. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg), acting for the City of London, summed up the Bill on Second Reading. He said:

> "I shall briefly explain the purposes of the Bill. It is to relocate the present market in Tower Hamlets to a fresh site in the London borough of Waltham Forest . . . It is to adapt and to amend many of the local enactments that are applicable to Spitalfields so that they apply to the market on its new site . . . to make no significant changes to market regulation law. It is also to require the corporation to offer accommodation in the relocated market to traders at Spitalfields market and at Stratford market, which is about one and a half miles from the relocation site."—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1988; Vol. 133, c. 521.]

On the face of it, the Bill is concerned only with the relocation of Spitalfields market. That raises such issues as market planning in London and the problems of traffic congestion. Almost any substantial market site has such problems.

I do not dismiss the important arguments about market planning and traffic congestion, but by far the most important issue—and that with which the Bill does not obviously deal, but which it is in fact all about—is what will happen to the 11 acres of prime land covered by the present market which sits cheek by jowl with the City.

If the Bill were designed simply to transfer the market to a new site, I do not think that the motion would be before the House today. One quite remarkable feature of the report of the City of London corporation of 22 October 1987 on the future of Spitalfields market is the assertion that there is

> "no overriding reason to relocate the market . . . despite these factors"—

that is, heavy traffic congestion—

> "the market is relatively successful and it has to be said that not all the problems are insurmountable: e.g. with the co-operation of the local authority (Tower Hamlets) and the Metropolitan Police much could be done to alleviate rubbish dumping and traffic congestion respectively. More space could be found in the area for vehicle parking and the Corporation could consider taking control of the surrounding streets in order to regulate the whole trading area."

There is no question of an over-riding case for transferring Spitalfields market. No such case was argued by the City of London, and none would stand up if anybody tried to sustain it. We have the Bill because of the 11 acres of land that are so near to the City of London.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I have listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. I do not wish to be rigid or to restrict the scope of debate unduly, but we are not discussing the content of the Bill, merely the motion on the Order Paper. The right hon. Gentleman should get back to the motion.

Mr. Shore: I shall try to do that, but whether the Bill should be revived and whether it should be proceeded with is closely linked. I find it difficult to imagine a closer link.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It was the right hon. Gentleman who reminded the House that the Bill had been given a Second Reading.

Mr. Shore: Indeed. The Question now before the House is whether the Bill should be revived and allowed to proceed. I am simply arguing the case and shall not do so at great length. It seems to be an appropriate moment to arrest the course of the Bill.

There is no overwhelming reason why, in relation to the operation of the market, the site should be moved. The strong reason given for moving it is related entirely to the value of the 12-acre site and what is to be done with it. The City of London and the Spitalfields development group presented Tower Hamlets council with a major plan for office redevelopment in the area. There were some other facilities but is was basically for offices. They had chosen to do that in an area which is, on all the indices of poverty,

[Mr. Shore]

deprivation and overcrowding, whether governmental or local governmental, the most deprived ward, not only in Tower Hamlets but in London. That ward has more problems—especially those related to homelessness, miserable and wretched overcrowding in housing and unemployment—than any other ward in London.

Is it justifiable to go ahead with a Bill which blocks off the land from the residents of Spitalfields in order to bring about yet another substantial office development in the area? It is not that the borough of Tower Hamlets is rich in land—it is not. At one time it looked as though we had found a solution to most of our problems when the London dockland area became vacant as ships moved down the Thames. However, as the House knows when the London Docklands Development Corporation was set up, the land was transferred to it and, therefore, was not available to the borough of Tower Hamlets for its pressing and urgent housing problem. The issue has raised the question of how we should go about inner city development. Nobody is arguing——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not relevant to the motion before the House.

Mr. Shore: All right. However, it relates to it and, even if I did not raise the matter, it would be on the minds of those concerned about it.

I wish to put to the House a matter that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may think is more closely related to the motion. The original plans—which were part of the deal behind the Bill and which the Spitalfields development group submitted to and negotiated with the City of London corporation and Tower Hamlets council—contained some proposals, including the development of some major offices.

In the *Estates Times*, on 28 October, we read:

> "A complete re-design of the redevelopment proposals for Spitalfields Market in Tower Hamlets could include the City's first major shopping centre."

Apparently the group is now considering a revamp of the plan to enable the group to develop a 250,000 to 300,000 sq ft shopping centre in the proposed development. This will be a major challenge to other shopping developments in the Whitechapel area and it puts an entirely new complexion on what is being proposed.

That change of plan has not been discussed in Committee, nor has it been reported to the House. Nobody is to blame for that because it became public only in the last few weeks. However, it is an important consideration.

The House has good reasons for not proceeding with the Bill and for sympathising with the plight and needs of the people of Spitalfields. It has good reasons for deciding that the Bill should be dropped and allowing the promoters—in the ample time that they will have—to sort out the proposals and, if they wish, to return with new proposals that are far better designed to serve the needs of the area.

7.24 pm

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): A number of concessions were made in Committee and people in the local community welcome the extra money for community gain and the covenant ensuring that two pieces of land, Elder gardens and Horner square, will remain open spaces. However, they are dismayed that no concession was made about Allyn gardens which is the largest park in Spitalfields, which is a heavily populated area with insufficient open space. The local people believe Allyn gardens will be developed by Tower Hamlets council.

The Committee Chairman said that he recognised the impact that the development will have on the community. If the Bill is allowed to proceed, it will indeed have a massive impact. The monetary concessions that have been made will not compensate for the devastation that will take place.

In addition, Holland estate, which is nearby, is to be taken over by a housing action trust unless the [illegible] are allowed to vote against it. That means that the [illegible] area will be heavily developed.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) referred to the article in the *Estates Times* from which it seems that important changes will be made. There will have to be substantial amendments to the plans because the demand for office space is falling and the amount of office space will be surplus to requirements. The article says that about a quarter of the space will be used for a shopping mall and that the new plan is that the shopping centre will have 300,000 sq ft and that the design will be based on the

> "Galeria in the centre of Milan."

The local authority already has a plan for a big shopping centre in Whitechapel, which is not far away. That plan would be destroyed and that shopping centre would no longer be viable if the Bill is allowed to proceed.

The plans are confused and the Bill should be returned and rethought. There are also plans for Whitechapel library, which is near the site. It is to be closed down and a compulsory purchase order will be imposed on the land behind it. That will be used for even more office space.

If the Bill is allowed to proceed there will be office space development gone mad. There will be two types of enterprise culture opposing each other. The Government purport to support small-scale firms in Spitalfields but they will be opposed by international high finance, with computer screens linking the City of London to the money markets of the world. That will change the nature of the area. The lives and livelihood of thousands of people, as well as the nature of the community and character of the area, are under threat. The Bill should not be allowed to proceed when there is such confusion and it seems that there will have to be a major change of plan.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 107, Noes 23.

Division No. 6] **[7.29 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Boswell, Tim
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Cash, William
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Cohen, Harry
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Durant, Tony
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fox, Sir Marcus
French, Douglas

Fry, Peter
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lawrence, Ivan
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, William *(Streatham)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Neil Thorne and
Mr. James Couchman.

NOES

Bermingham, Gerald
Corbett, Robin
Darling, Alistair
Dobson, Frank
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Haynes, Frank
Home Robertson, John
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Salmond, Alex
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Graham Allen.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the City of London (Spitalfields Market) Bill may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

Ordered,

That the Bill shall be presented to the House not later than the seventh day after this day;

Ordered,

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the last Session;

Ordered,

That the Bill shall be laid upon the Table of the House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be deemed to have been read the first and second time (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read) and shall be ordered to be read the third time;

Ordered,

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *[LORDS]*

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill [*Lords*] may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

Ordered,

That, if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agent for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by him, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

Ordered,

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be deemed to have been read the first time and shall be ordered to be read a second time;

Ordered,

That, no Petitions against the Bill having been presented within the time limited in the last Session, no Petitioners shall be heard before any committee on the Bill save those who complain of any amendment as proposed in the filled up Bill or of any matter which arises during the progress of the Bill before the committee;

Ordered,

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.—*[The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[LORDS]*

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the London Local Authorities Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

Ordered,

That, if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the agent for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by him, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

Ordered,

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be deemed to have been read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

Ordered,

That all Petitions relating to the Bill presented in the last Session which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session;

Ordered,

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the last Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

Ordered,

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words "under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)" were omitted;

Ordered,

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.—*[The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Summer Time

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7876/88, on Summer Time arrangements; and supports the continuation of the existing arrangements for a further three years to enable the Government to consult and give careful consideration to future summer time arrangements.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

7.40 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Do I assume that the motion has been moved and that because no hon. Member has risen to speak, and if I had not risen, there would have been no debate? I am not quite sure about the procedure at this stage. Perhaps you can enlighten us because I believe that the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) wants to speak. I am not sure whether he can move his amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I apologise to the House. I have proposed the Question rather than put it. I have not thwarted anyone's hopes of participating in a debate. I should have told the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) and his hon. Friends. If the hon. Member for Southend, East is trying to catch my eye, I will call him.

7.40 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I beg to move, to leave out from first 'arrangements' to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'but regrets the decision of Her Majesty's Government to accept that the Directive falls under Article 100A; and urges Her Majesty's Government to reconsider the issues raised by the European Scrutiny Committees of both Houses and the opinion of Mr. Speaker's Counsel as expressed in Annex B to the report of the Select Committee on European Legislation of this House before engaging in further discussions on the Directive.

I apologise for the fact that I am moving the amendment rather than one of my hon. Friends because, unfortunately, we have the impression nowadays, sadly, that European matters of significance are debated only very late at night. I am sure that you are aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this can be a bit embarrassing. I am sure that we should all be aware that Mr. Speaker and Mr. Deputy Speaker always maintain their very good general relations with hon. Members despite our very late hours.

Basically we are debating a simple issue of principle which affects everyone in our country. Over the years summer time has caused major debates and disagreements in the House. It relates to human safety, the lives of children and adults and we all know that if we get the date wrong, that could result in a serious loss of life. To that extent the House has torn itself apart. I remember delegations from the north of Scotland and the north-east of England pleading with the House to move in a certain direction. We know, for example, that if we make summer time in a certain way, children in the north tend to go to school in the dark. Sadly those issues have dominated the House and caused enormous controversy.

We are worried because the European Community has put forward a directive, the object of which is basically to try to ensure that the decision on summer time will be made not by the United Kingdom Parliament but by the majority vote of the Council of Ministers.

I am delighted that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson), is here because he is one of the most conscientious attenders in the House. I am sure that he will be aware from our many previous discussions that, sadly, there is a whole range of issues on which the House does not make its own decisions and about which the European Community takes a decision by a majority vote. It is very sad that the average person in Britain is probably not fully aware that laws are being passed by the majority vote of the Council of Ministers and Parliament must simply abide by them.

That is only one part of a whole scene of shifting responsibility from national Parliaments to the EEC. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister expressed concern about that in her recent important speech in Bruges.

Sovereignty is slipping away in three ways. First, there has been a huge increase in the powers of the European Court of Justice. Only recently the Government were instructed by the European Court of Justice to levy VAT on hearing aids, spectacles and new commercial and industrial buildings. That is one sign of sovereignty going away.

Secondly, sovereignty has been slipping away through the powers used by the Commission. The Commission is simply the EEC's civil servants, but it has been taking more and more power. We have seen that recently in the ban imposed on the import of all apples into the EEC without consulting excellent Ministers like my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for their opinions.

Probably the most dangerous and worrying transfer of sovereignty has been through the Single European Act which, sadly, Parliament discussed on a guillotine very late on a Thursday night continuing through to Friday. As a result of that, decisions may be made in certain areas on laws to apply to all member states by a majority vote.

At the time, the Government said that they would be very careful to ensure that only those laws requiring majority vote were actually transferred. That is why the excellent Select Committee on European Legislation has looked carefully at the way in which the Commission is seeking to extend article 100A which means extending majority voting to issues which should not normally go that way. For the first time in my experience as an hon. Member for many years, I was fascinated to see in the report of the Select Committee on European Legislation the actual guidance from Mr. Speaker's counsel who stated specifically and categorically that the summer time order should not fall under article 100A. If it had stayed under article 100A, we would still have the right to say no if we did not like it.

We know that under this proposal the EEC is allowing the United Kingdom—*[Interruption.]* I am delighted that a Scottish Member has arrived in the Chamber. The Scottish people feel very strongly about this issue. They passionately believe that Scottish lives are threatened. Not only has the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) arrived on the Scottish Nationalist Benches, but as always —and we take this for granted—my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) is present. He is protecting Scottish interests and looking after the interests of his constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North should be an example to all hon. Members, with the conscientious attention that he pays to the debates in this House.

The Commission and the Council of Ministers have agreed that the United Kingdom can have three years during which it can basically go its own way on summer time. If we want to have a different date to end summer time, we can go our own way. Many of us are worried that because that is being done under article 100A, after the three years the EEC, by majority, can state what summer time will apply in Britain. Even if we did not like that, even if 650 hon. Members said that it was rubbish and put lives in danger, the new date would apply because of article 100A.

I appreciate that summer time is a very controversial issue which will divide hon. Members. I know that hon. Members from Scotland have very strong feelings because they know that their constituents feel desperately strongly about the dangers to children if we get summer time wrong. The papers presented to us from the EEC acknowledge that many lives could be put at risk if we get summer time wrong.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department promised in our last debate on this matter to look very carefully at the issue of the use of article 100A. I am now worried because it appears that the Government accept that article 100A is appropriate. How can anyone say that this issue involves freedom of trade or the internal market? Surely the fixing of summer time is a question for the Parliaments of each member state. Whether one is an enthusiast of the Common Market or a critic of it, there must be some issues on which national Parliaments must make up their own minds. I accept that some people would say that it would be more convenient if everyone in Europe had the same time. Of course it would, in the same way as that argument applies in the United States where there are wide variations in time. Even so, that does not upset the internal market.

Why on earth do the Government agree to article 100A? If they agree to it, do they not accept that there is a whole range of issues on which we can simply move to majority voting? We heard Mr. Jacques Delors say in Brussels recently that the time would come when 80 per cent. of our laws would be made in Brussels by majority vote. Mr. Delors was wrong. That time has come and that is obvious from the flood of Euro measures. We have considered three this week. If hon. Members took their jobs terribly seriously—as all hon. Members do—and studied this weekend the mass of papers for the debate on Monday night, they would be horrified to see what is proposed.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The hon. Gentleman will realise that many years ago we said that if we decided to join the Common Market this kind of thing would happen. Slowly but surely our rights are being taken away. We shall soon be told when we can get up and when we can go to bed. We are being told exactly what to do. Slowly but surely, the decisions that we have to make for the people of this nation are being taken away from us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a debate on summer time, not bed time.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is right. Many people feel that. However, in fairness I should say that all the sovereign rights that have gone—the hon. Gentleman and I have been in the same Lobbies in opposing them—have

[Mr. Taylor]

been approved by the House of Commons. We must ask ourselves tonight whether more sovereignty is going than Parliament has agreed to.

In the Single European Act and in our own legislation we have defined what was included under article 100A. That is not just the view of some strange nut speaking from the Back Benches; that was the crucial issue raised by the Scrutiny Committees of the House of Commons and the other place where wise people look at such matters with great care. They said that on this matter article 100A did not appear to be appropriate. We have the expert advice of Mr. Speaker's counsel that article 100A should not apply. Anybody who studies such matters would also say that article 100A was not appropriate.

What worries me is that if this measure goes through we have no idea what the Council of Ministers will do in three, four or five years' time. What we do know is that the right to decide summer time has gone from the House of Commons and will be decided by the majority vote of the Council of Ministers.

That is even more worrying when we realise what is involved. It is not just a matter of whether we have an extra hour's sleep; we are talking about real-life issues—the convenience of industry, the lives of children and what happens on our roads.

Some may say that that is silly and that the Common Market will always do the sensible thing. However, some take the view that it does not always do what is sensible, and I am among that number. But whether we think that or not, the crucial point is that Parliament is passing the power to decide to a group of Ministers. It would not be so bad if those Ministers considered every issue on its merits, but we all know from previous experience that if, for example, we want Holland's support on an agricultural matter and Holland wants our support on issues affecting health and safety, people say, "We will support you on this if you support us on that." That is an unsatisfactory form of democracy, but we cannot discuss that tonight because that decision was taken by Parliament a long time ago.

In view of what was said when we last discussed this matter, and in view of the importance of the issue to people throughout Britain, are the Government willing to say that article 100A does not apply? If not, will they say why? If we agree to this, oher matters can be similarly decided upon.

The Government have said that we shall have a new thinking period of three years in which to decide which way we want to go. There are several options. We all know them. The crucial one is whether to stop summer time in September or October. I do not want to go into the rights and wrongs of this because those views have been expressed by hon. Members in Parliament time and again. The crucial issue is why we should allow an issue such as this to be decided by a majority vote of the Council of Ministers, about which we can do nothing.

We have seen time and again recently that, irrespective of the views of the Government and Members of Parliament, if the Council of Ministers decides something by a majority, that is that and we have to implement it. Only a few weeks ago we had to pass an order abolishing origin marking. The right of people to know where something is made has gone, not because the Government wanted that, but because the Commission said that it was wrong to discriminate between European goods. The Government took legal advice and were told that they should accept that ruling.

I appreciate that the battle over the loss of sovereignty was, to some degree, decided when we passed the Single European Act. I opposed it, but the majority voted for it and that is settled. What worries me is that we are adding a crucial matter to what has already gone and that is tragic. Therefore, I appeal to the Government to think carefully about the amendments and about standing firm on this occasion. Even if they lose the battle—we appreciate that the change will be difficult to get through the Council—at least the British people will know that the Government are speaking up for Britain and for Parliament.

Hon Members on both sides of the House were greatly heartened by what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in Bruges. However, words are one thing, actions are another. Therefore, I appeal to the Minister on this occasion to stand up for parliamentary sovereignty and the rights of our people, and stand up against the threat to the lives of our children. Try to make sure that on this occasion we say that this matter should be decided by the United Kingdom Parliament, not by the Council of Ministers.

7.55 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I shall take only a couple of minutes, but it is regrettable that I should have to take even that time. The summer time issue should have been settled when we last rejected the experiment in the early 1970s. My predecessor in the House made his maiden speech in that debate and it is regrettable that we should still be discussing the same old issues.

My main objection is to the option to change winter time to British summer time and to have summer time plus one hour. That experiment was tried in the early 1970s and it failed. It was hugely unpopular in the north of Scotland, particularly in my constituency, where discontent was such that there was a grassroots movement to go on to our own time zone which we were also to call BST—British Stornaway time. I am sure that if the Government take up this option seriously, we shall see the same grassroots movement against it.

I draw the Minister's attention to the recent survey by the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland as recently as the early summer of this year, in which it asked its various affiliated organisations their preferences on the various options being canvassed by the Government for the alteration of summer time. Of the 28 organisations that replied, 19 said that they preferred the status quo; only two wanted British summer time during the winter. Those organisations that wish to retain the status quo had their bases in Scotland and their members in some way or other made most of their living off the land, whether through farming, forestry or even tourism. The two organisations which wanted a change were the Ramblers Association and the Royal Automobile Club Motoring Services, both of which have their headquarters in London. That is instructive.

The notion that the change suggested in the Government's list of options has anything to do with the need to develop a single market is preposterous. It is as preposterous as the notion that we must have a uniform sales tax across the EEC. The example of the United States shows that it functions perfectly well with differential sales taxes in different states. Several different time zones also operate across that continent. There is no reason why we cannot do the same, even in the context of a united states of Europe and a movement towards greater European unification in respect of other matters.

The application of a central European time from the most northern part of Europe down to the Mediterranean will not make any sense. At this early opportunity, I record my constituents' opposition, which is shared, I am sure, by most of the north of Scotland.

8 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I support the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), because there is no question—I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take this on board—that the view in Scotland is almost totally unanimous. I say "almost" because one usually finds that organisations that do not support the Scottish view have their roots and origins in London. Scottish-based organisations, and certainly my own constituents, have posed more questions to me on this subject than they have on the community charge, which gives an indication of their depth of feeling.

Summer time has been an issue for many years, and whenever there have been proposals for experimentation, Scotland has wanted the status quo to continue. I hope that, during the three-year respite, the Government will have second thoughts about the way in which they deal with the directive and accept that it does not come under article 100A but is something on which they should take a stand.

It is not the great issues that mostly affect people's attitudes but the small matters that impinge on their everyday lives. A change in British summer time will doubtless have an enormous impact on everyday life. The hon. Member for Western Isles, using the United States as an example, argued that it is nonsense to claim that such a change is necessary to make the market more efficient.

That certainly is the most nonsensical argument anyone can produce. The finest markets operate worldwide. The Japanese would not work any more effectively and efficiently if they observed a different time zone. They operate under a very different time zone from ours, yet they manage to penetrate our markets successfully. It is ridiculous to suggest that a change in summer time will help the market place. It is instead an administrative notion, from bureaucrats who like everything nice and tidy and who want us all to be the same. It is time people realised that Scotland likes to be different. We enjoy being different, and we want to be different. There are good reasons why we are different, and those differences will be impinged upon by a change of the kind proposed.

8.3 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The House will note the exceptional Scottish interest there is in this matter. That is not surprising when one remembers that Scotland was the place of the previous British summer time experiment, which was far from relished. The strength of feeling now being expressed results from that earlier experiment, which caused major problems for Scotland.

The hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) pointed out that his predecessor, the right hon. Donald Stewart, used his maiden speech to emphasise his opposition to British standard time. Scotland's geography has not changed, and the arguments used then still hold true.

In the British Isles, the sun rises on a line roughly south-west to north-east. In the middle of December, it is 10.15 am before Scots begin to see a blink of daylight. That is why there were demands for the abolition of British standard time from a host of sources, including the National Federation of Building Trade Employers, worried about the consequences for the building industry; the National Farmers Union, whose members faced special problems rising from the adoption of British standard time; the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers; the Union of Post Office Workers; the Scottish Inshore White Fish Producers Association, and others. Opposition was clearly expressed by a whole range of Scottish organisations. I am certain that if they were asked again, they would express a similar view.

Scotland's geographic realities mean that uniformity with more southerly European states will create major problems in rural areas for farmers, the construction industry and others. Scotland's lower temperatures will combine with the penalties imposed by extra hours of darkness to increase industry's costs and its energy and light requirements. It will place an extra stress on the population. I ask the Government to note the problems that women and children in rural areas will face if they are forced to walk great distances in darkness. The earlier objections to the proposals stand, but today we live in a very different society, posing even greater dangers to the individual.

I want to get over to the Government the message that Scotland would face many problems if such a change is made. It is not beyond the wit of humankind to take into account the geographic realities of Scotland's northern areas and to act accordingly. The Soviet Union and the United States have different time zones, and it should not be beyond the wit of the Community to devise a solution that will suit its members. The last experiment showed that a change will bring major problems for Scotland. There was desperate opposition to it, and nothing has changed since then. I hope that the Government, in all their dealings in this matter, will take account of Scotland's plea and the nature of the problems that a return to British standard time would create for it.

If the Government question whether there really is such opposition they have only to ask, for I am sure that they will receive exactly the same message. Scotland requires a time structure that suits its special needs, not one that is imposed for external reasons.

8.6 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I cannot be as brief or as wide ranging as some right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken for the reason that has already been given by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor): I am Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation, whose two lengthy reports on the subject I draw to the attention of the House.

I wish to address points of legal and constitutional significance. Important though the considerations are to which my hon. Friends and other hon. Members have referred, ultimately it will be for its constitutional and legal aspects that this case will be remembered. Unfortunately, the proceedings of the House mean that the Minister did

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

not open this debate. I suppose that that is the responsibility of those of us who did not take the opportunity to permit him to do so by drawing to your attention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the method that would make that possible. I regret to say that, but for a point of order, this matter could have gone through on the nod. However, the Minister will have one go and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) also has one go.

I want to clear the ground, and the Minister will correct me if I am wrong. We are discussing a number of points relating to summer time, but we are really discussing the EEC's fifth directive. As I understand it, if voluntary agreement is not reached by 1993 the consequence will be that we shall be dictated to not only as to GMT plus two, and when that finishes or changes, but also in respect of the voluntary arrangement for its start, and that those decisions will be made for us by the Council of Ministers by majority vote. Important though that is to all right hon. and hon. Members, it is a striking example of the way in which decisions—including the time at which we shall go to bed—are being made for our country by majority vote of the Council of Ministers. Meanwhile, the Government are arranging a survey. When the Minister replies, no doubt he will tell the House something of the results which —surprise, surprise—might mean the Government presenting proposals fitting in with those of our European partners across the Channel. In that case there would be no need for that vote. I rather suspect that such an arrangement may emerge, although I do not wish to be too cynical. I am trying to clear the ground. As I have said, we are discussing the fifth directive, which the Select Committee considered of sufficient legal and political importance to be debated in the House.

I must now revert to important and detailed constitutional matters which may be difficult to describe and even more difficult to understand. But the example that I shall give may reveal not only to the British public but to hon. Members the extent to which majority voting will replace our own legislation, not just on summer time but in a sphere as yet undefined.

I believe, as I said in a speech the other day, that when the House passed the Single European Act and authorised the insertion in the treaty of Rome of article 100A, no one —including myself—understood the implication. If anyone did, we were not told. Certainly no one told the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, of which I was then a Member, and no Minister mentioned the implication with which I shall deal tonight. Either they did not know or they were concealing it from the House. I am one of those with a charitable turn of mind who believes that they did not know.

I am not suggesting that the Minister will venture tonight into those lofty areas of politics and constitution, although as a lawyer he will probably understand their importance. It was because he understood such matters that, when they were raised in a debate on 28 April by the hon. Member for Southend, East and myself, he doubted whether the use of article 100A would be appropriate. That, at least, was my interpretation of what he said. Since then we have corresponded with the Home Secretary. I should like to quote some of that rather lengthy correspondence in a moment, as it is very significant.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I do not want the hon. Gentleman to misunderstand my stance at the last debate, and I am sure that he did not intend to do so. I chose my words very carefully. What I said was:

> "I do not propose to express a concluded view on the issue, if only because I do not think that I am competent to do so."

I went on to say:

> "I am not irrevocably persuaded that article 100A applies to the directive. Clearly, that matter requires further consideration. I most certainly do not concede that the directive is intra vires article 100A."—[*Official Report*, 28 April 1988; c. 617.]

Mr. Spearing: I wholeheartedly concur, and I am grateful to the Minister for putting that on the record. I think that I referred to "doubt", and it is fair to say that there was doubt across the Floor of the House about the suitability of the article in relation to summer time.

I must now go into the details of the written constitution under which the House now operates, which will, I am afraid, take some time. Article 8A of the treaty of Rome, on which article 100A hangs, states:

> "The internal market shall comprise an area without internal frontiers, in which the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital is ensured in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty."

To that extent it defines the internal market. Article 100A, to which it gave life, is much longer, but the important paragraph for our purposes reads thus:

> "The Council shall . . . in co-operation with the European Parliament and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, adopt the measures for the approximation of the provisions laid down by law, regulations or adminstrative action in Member States which have as their object the establishment and functioning of the internal market."

The important word there is "functioning". Any law or regulation in a member state that impinges on the functioning, or non-functioning, of the internal market comes within the ambit of article 100A, or would at least appear to. I should mention that article 100A is subject to majority voting, whereas article 100—the original article in the treaty—speaks of

> "the establishment and functioning of the common market."

That article was subject to unanimity. There is, of course, a difference between the functioning of the Common Market and that of the internal market, and they are governed by slightly different articles.

Mr. Speaker's counsel drew the attention of the Select Committee in Report HC43 No. 15 to the use of article 100A in respect of what was then the fourth directive, which, as I have said, we discussed on 28 April. Mr. Speaker's counsel, who advises Mr. Speaker on legal matters, told the Committee—and we thought it important enough to note his advice in annex B—that the Government, who are responsible to the House, should not have been content with the choice of article 100A for the directive in question. In being so content—as I shall illustrate by quoting from a letter from the Home Secretary—they are making the directive subject to majority voting; if it had remained under article 100 it would have been subject to unanimity.

It is an important choice for any Government to have to make. The Council of Ministers can, if it wishes, challenge the basis of a regulation chosen by the Commission. The Commission is much more powerful than some hon. Members who have made speeches recently: it alone can produce draft laws and regulations. Any one of the 600-odd hon. Members in the House can present private Members' Bills, but the Prime Minister herself cannot put a draft proposal before the Council of Ministers.

The Commission is the eye of the needle. Moreover, it not only puts forward the law but cites the article of the treaty of Rome—which is our written constitution—on which it is based. If it is based on an article that requires unanimity, that gives every nation a veto. On the other hand, if article 100A is cited, a qualified majority of 23 votes is required to stop or block it. The United Kingdom and West Germany have only 10 each. Even two major states are not sufficient on their own to block a proposal under article 100A.

Hon. Members may say that it all sounds a bit legal and complicated so far, but so what? If article 100A is chosen for the summer time directive there may be a few chunterings from a few hon. Members, but what does it matter? It matters very much, because if the Commission is able to cite article 100A for this directive, what will they not be able to cite it for? We are not talking just about the length of daylight, the number of hours in GMT plus or minus or the date on which it should finish. Strange though it may seem in an unexpectedly early debate in an almost empty Chamber, we are really talking about the powers of the EEC to pre-empt the legislative authority of the House.

I have said on radio and in speeches that we do not know the perimeters to that power. I do not think that the Government know, either. I certainly do not think that the Home Office knows.

The Select Committee has embarked on a study of the choice of treaty base after the Single European Act comes into force. We have taken evidence—in HC 178—iv and v —from Government spokesmen, including evidence from Home Office spokesmen. The report is not yet complete and I do not intend to quote from it, but the witnesses appeared to be somewhat at variance with one another. We are still conducting that inquiry, so I shall not pursue the matter. It is still, as it were, sub judice. However, the Home Office spokesmen gave evidence as to why the Home Office thinks that article 100A is suitable in this instance. We are to take evidence from other witnesses before we publish our report.

In the meantime, the Government are steaming on and using that article, despite the fact that in the original report on the matter—HC 43-xv—we questioned its use. After the debate on 28 April to which the Minister referred I wrote to the Home Secretary and asked him why, in the fifth directive—the one with which we are dealing—the Government accepted article 100A in their explanatory memorandum and why they also accepted it in the Council of Ministers. I also asked the Home Secretary to explain why, after the doubts that had been expressed on various occasions about the use of article 100A, the Government went ahead with it.

In our next report that was published last week—HC 43 xxxviii—we published the correspondence that I have had with the Home Secretary on the topic. I shall read to the House the last part of our report so as to put the matter into context. On page 6 we say:

> "The Committee's concern about this point arises from the inference to be drawn from the arguments used by the Home Office, namely that, if any perceived internal market element found recourse to Article 100A, only political considerations restrict the scope of Community action under this Article in areas not specifically excluded. The Legal Adviser points out that this could have implications for national competence and, more significantly, draw the outline of a massive area in which Member States' freedom of action may be inhibited pending Community action. Furthermore, acceptance of this approach in one case may have implications for the Government's position regarding other proposals. The Committee therefore intends to pursue this question in the context of its current studies on choice of Treaty base.
>
> The Committee demonstrates above that this proposal raises important legal questions. It considers that important political questions are also raised and recommends further consideration by the House on the occasion of a debate on Summer Time Arrangements."

That is this debate.

I revert to the original note of Mr. Speaker's counsel and to the reasons why he doubts whether this regulation ought to come under article 100A. The point is fairly clear.

Summer time does not affect the physical movement of goods or the movement of telephonic communications. The establishment of the internal market depends upon the breaking down of physical and legal barriers. We have to ask what physical or legal barriers are impeded by different time zone arrangements. I put it to the House that there is little evidence of that. "Ah," say those in favour, "yes, there is. Business men, speaking from one side of the Channel to the other, or from one time zone to another, are inconvenienced by different time zones. Therefore," say those who are in favour of using article 100A, "there are commercial and market elements that justify the use of 100A." They say that it is justified, even if the British people believe that matters such as agriculture and daylight are important, apart from the importance of this House deciding for itself what should be done. It is a constitutional issue.

Whether one consideration justifies the use of article 100A over all other considerations is a moot point. We debated that matter on 28 April. After that debate there was the Home Office's decision and the fifth directive. The Home Office said that it was content that article 100A should be used, but it did not tell the House at that time. We found out by looking at the explanatory memorandum, where we saw that article 100A had been accepted and that the Home Office had not objected to its inclusion. Therefore, we shall have to accept a majority decision in due course.

I want to take the House one stage further. If the Home Office believes that that is acceptable, which other Government Departments will accept article 100A when only elements of commerce or the market are involved instead of commerce and the market being absolutely overwhelming or dominant?

Mr. Teddy Taylor: The matter is even more serious than that. According to the Home Secretary's letter, which is published in the report, he does not argue that it comes within article 100A. He states simply that he finds it difficult to argue that it does not fall within article 100A and that even if it did he would not win the case before the Council of Ministers. As the Government are allowing it to go through—not because they agree with it but because they think that it might be difficult to prove that they do not agree with it—does that not mean that a much wider scope of legislation will be passed from this Parliament to Brussels?

Mr. Spearing: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman. He takes me in this arcane but fundamentally important area to my next point. The correspondence that

[Mr. Spearing]

I have had with the Home Secretary—published in our latest report, HC43-xxxviii—reproduces in length what the hon. Gentleman has just said. The Home Secretary said:

> "To understand how the Fifth Directive would contribute to the establishment and functioning of the internal market, it has to be read alongside earlier Directives in the series, especially the First Directive of 2 July 1980/737/EEC, the recitals of which clearly indicate that the objective pursued is to facilitate transport and telecommunications between Member States."

As I have just demonstrated, transport is not impeded by a time zone boundary. A ship or an aeroplane does not stop at a boundary for an hour or so, or even for a day, and then proceed on its journey. All that it does is to change the time. Similarly, there is no impedance, other than electrical, in the electric current of the airwaves or those of the telephone. There is no immediate interruption or pause, as there is at a boundary.

The Home Secretary went on to say that the presidency had been helpful in delaying matters to allow time for the Select Committee to look at the matter and to allow the debate to take place, but the Home Secretary does not dissent from the belief that this regulation is well founded on article 100A, whereas the Committee believes that it is not.

I hope to persuade the House—whatever we do about this particular regulation—that the Home Secretary is wrong and the Government are wrong and had they gone to the EEC Court they would have had a very good argument. If we look at countries which cover a very wide latitude and constitute a single internal market, whether or not it is regulated—particularly the United States of America, the USSR or other countries divided by fewer commercial or political boundaries—it is clear that physical requirements require them to have a time zone because of the latitude that they occupy. However, nobody would suggest that that impedes the claimed economic effectiveness of a single internal market.

How can the existence of time zones intrinsically affect the internal market? It may be that people are inconvenienced socially. It may mean that a man in Paris or a man in London may find it less convenient to telephone at a particular time, but no doubt he would find it inconvenient to telephone Madrid at lunchtime, even if they were in the same time zone. That is a social inconvenience which has nothing to do with time zones or statutes. It is a matter of social habit.

In conclusion, the Government have not, in the view of the Select Committee, made a good case for article 100A. In fact, they have made no case at all. If they have been content to allow article 100A to go through on this matter, when in our view there was an excellent case to resist it, why and on what basis are they accepting article 100A on many other issues in the Cockfield package, and no doubt in the years ahead, without saying, "No, we object to that. It must come under another article where the Government's powers will be stronger and we are not likely to be outvoted by the Council of Ministers."

That is the nub issue. Is it that the Government have not woken up to the fact that the choice of treaty base is fundamental to determine whether the House or the Council of Ministers decides? If they have not woken up to that, they had better do so pretty quickly. If they have, why did they let article 100A through on summer time when we believe that the case was minimal? There must be an answer to that, and the answer bears fundamentally on the constitution of this nation, on the freedom of its subjects and on the power of the House to decide on laws in the United Kingdom. The debate has arisen, as it were, by accident at an unexpected time, but I believe that the issues are fundamental ones with which we have been attempting to grapple. I do not believe that the Government have understood them, and they certainly have not grappled with them inside the Council of Ministers. If they had, we would not be debating the issue here tonight.

8.33 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): This has been an important debate and, ironically, it has been quite short, given the two important matters which it raises. The extremely important question of summer time causes a great deal of concern, especially in Scotland and in the north and west of Britain. My hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) have touched upon those points. The debate also raises a very important constitutional issue for the United Kingdom which the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) and my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) have raised. It is ironic that the proponents have changed, that those who support the measure are not here tonight and it looks as if the Minister is on his own. I wonder whether the Government are using this measure, which is uncontentious in certain parts of the country, as a bridgehead and as an experiment to see the reaction of the House to the use of article 100A. It is setting a precedent which worries many of us.

The proposal illustrates the perils of centralisation. I believe that we are being pushed towards accepting what is best for the centre of Europe after 1993, rather than having regard to the needs and wishes of all parts of the United Kingdom.

The Commission at least has accepted that there is a problem and that the case for change is not proved. We have a breathing space of some three years to debate the matter further and to decide what to do. The directive proposes no change for three further years, and to that extent we are certainly not opposed to it.

Before examining the merits or otherwise of summer time, may I say that a preliminary point has been raised at some length by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South. The directive is made under article 100A, which is directed towards measures which have as their objective the establishment and functioning of a single market. However, the article seems to be a catch-all, rather like a breach of the peace in criminal law. If one cannot get someone under something specific, one can go for breach of the peace. The idea that a common time system is part of the scope of the single market, and an essential part of it, seems a very broad interpretation and lends weight to the belief that this measure is being used as a bridgehead to try something out.

The 38th report of the Select Committee on European Legislation, dated 2 November, states:

> "The Committee continues to doubt the general appropriateness of Article 100A as the Treaty base for Summer Time Directives. Whilst it notes the arguments advanced that the objective pursued is to facilitate transport and telecommunications between Member States, it finds it difficult to accept that time differences per se either constitute

> an impediment to such services or to free movement or constitute 'internal frontiers'. If this contention is accepted, it is consequently difficult to see how such proposals can 'have as their object the establishment and functioning of the internal market', the test for recourse to Article 100A as a Treaty base."

Of course, that is absolutely right. It is difficult to see why article 100A has been relied upon by the Government except that it provides a bridgehead and means that it is extremely difficult for us to go against the Commission were it to decide against us.

I remind the House that article 4 of the directive clearly states:

> "The Council, acting on a proposal from the Commission, shall adopt by 1 January 1992 the arrangements to apply from 1993 onwards."

That means that, no matter what may be the wishes of the House, no matter what the Government may care about it, the Commission can do what it likes. The Commission is in Brussels, and I believe that, in common with the ideas in this country being dictated from a certain corner of the United Kingdom, what comes from the EEC is often conditioned by the way things are seen from Brussels rather than from anywhere else. We must have some regard to that and it should be a matter of some concern and I hoped that more hon. Members would have paid attention to it. If article 100A is to be used in such a broad manner, it has significant implications for the sovereignty of this Parliament.

I was not here when the Single European Act and other European measures were debated, but I wonder whether right hon. and hon. Members appreciated what they were doing, and in particular the impact of article 100A. As the hon. Member for Angus, East spoke in the debate, I must stress that there is a clear indication of how preposterous is the notion of Scotland within Europe. If we are subject to article 100A under which majority voting decides, the very idea of a country with three votes having any great influence is utterly preposterous. I very much hope that the hon. Member for Angus, East will tell his chums when he sees them later that what they are proposing is preposterous and does not stand up.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: I must point out the alliance between the Conservative party and the Labour party. The hon. Gentleman is echoing the statement made by the Secretary of State for Scotland when he was rudely dismissive of Denmark, Greece and other nations in Europe. What is important is that Scotland has a direct voice, unlike the present situation in which we are represented by delegates of delegates. It is important that Scotland is in Europe in its own right, and the hon. Gentleman should appreciate that.

Mr. Darling: The short answer is that if Scotland was an independent country it would have only three votes and would still be subject to the majority wish. If the majority was against Scotland, it could do nothing about it. Now that we are in the EEC and have subjected ourselves to article 100A—there is no reason to believe that all member states will not be subjected to it—we are surrendering much of our sovereignty to that body.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in terms of entry into Europe and influence in making decisions, many Scots have been represented in both Conservative and Labour Governments? When a Labour Government are in office, it will contain many Scots.

Mr. Darling: I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman welcoming the idea of a Labour Government with so many Scots in it.

Article 100A has been discussed at some length. I hope that the Minister will reply to the points that have been made and that the House will have an opportunity to discuss the matter again.

One's view of British summer time or double summer time depends on whether one lives north and west of a line running from Devon to Teesside—a new variation of the north-south divide. There are two options for change: first, to adopt the continental end date of September. I see no advantage in that. The longer nights will start one month early. It will hit tourism, prove difficult for industry, add to costs and affect the safety of children who live north of the line running between Devon and Teesside. Some of us still think of September as summer. The only justification for adopting a common end date in September must be the blinkered view that everything should be the same throughout Europe. If there must be a change, the end date should be in October.

The second option needs more attention because I suspect that that is the one towards which the Government are trying to edge us. That is to have British summer time in winter and double summer time in summer. It sounds good, but on closer examination I wonder whether it is. In December, from south-west Ireland to Berwick, the sun would not rise until 9.35 am and would set at about 5 pm. In Oban, the sun would rise at about 9.55 am and in Lerwick it would not rise until after 10 am and would set at 4 pm. In the south-east of England, the sun would rise at about 9.10 am and set at about 5 pm.

Many people would be travelling to work or going to school and returning in darkness in the north and west of the United Kingdom. That worries many people and the Government will have to consider it seriously. It is not good enough to say, "It will be fine for the majority of the country who live in the south and east. Never mind the rest." It is important to recognise the serious risks to people travelling to work in the morning, and especially children travelling to school, on roads that are still covered in ice.

It is not as though our later mornings will be compensated for by longer evenings in the winter. For much of the winter, the sun will set at 5 pm or 6 pm, which means that children and people coming home from work will do so in darkness, or at least when the light is fading. As my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles said, people were badly hit by the change in his constituency. No wonder that an attempt was made to establish Stornoway time instead of the time to which the rest of the United Kingdom was operating.

I am sceptical about the benefits for leisure and safety. The case for safety has certainly not been proved and much more work must be done. The idea that in the winter we shall all be outside playing games and enjoying leisure activities is preposterous. No matter what one does with the time, we can do nothing about the British weather. For much of the year, especially in winter and sometimes in summer, it is not especially pleasant to be outdoors in the evenings.

Lest some may say that I have taken an example in December, when the evenings are darker anyway, let us consider the position in February. West of a line between Penzance and Edinburgh, the sun will not rise until after 8.20 am, so the position will not be that much better.

[Mr. Darling]

It is worth examining the arguments deployed in favour of double summer time, although we have heard none tonight. That emphasises again that the result will not be longer hours of daylight in the evening. We are told that there would be a reduction in the number of fatalities in road accidents, and that the increase in accidents in the morning will be more than offset by the likely reduction in the latter part of the day. That is no comfort to someone who may be injured in the morning. The Government should consider the experiments conducted in Sweden, which have found mornings to be the peak time for injuries and fatalities in road accidents. The fact that most people live in the south and east of England, where the mornings are lighter, twists the statistics for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Another argument is that there will be a small reduction in the number of burglaries and other criminal offences. That is wishful thinking.

The Government and those in Brussels argue that the change would create a substantial improvement in all aspects of trade and travel. But their argument does not stand up. If a British business man wishes to telephone his counterpart in France or Germany, it is not too difficult for him to arrange matters so that he telephones at a time when that person is at his desk. The United States struggles by with five time zones, yet no one has said that its economic performance has been adversely affected. The USSR manages to struggle by with 11 time zones.

It is nonsense to suggest that we should have the same time across Europe. We are encouraged not to use our telephones before 1 pm, and most people are used to arranging their affairs so that they speak when they know that people are there. It is a mere excuse for tinkering with the present system. What about the British business men who want to speak to people in Japan or to do business on the New York stock exchange? Should we have a world time?

The argument about harmonisation is flawed. There is no problem in having a Europe with great differences, whether they are cultural, political or based on time. No one is crying out for a change, so why do it? It is ironic that a Conservative Government, who are supposed to be about conserving things, want to change the present system. Even in July in Greece it gets dark at about 7 pm —that is one of the nice things about it. No one suggests that the Greeks should change their system to get longer evenings, even if that were possible.

The case for change has not been made. There are strong arguments that must be considered, and I hope that the Minister will tell us who has been consulted and the progress of his review. Most of the people to whom I have spoken on both sides of the House believe that the review is being carried out in a less than open manner. To whom is the Minister speaking, and in which areas of the country? Will he bear in mind the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles that organisations that function in Scotland and are based in London may not be the best ones to consult? I want an open period of consultation during which everyone in the United Kingdom can make his views known. Many people are unaware that this measure is being discussed tonight. Many hon. Members are unaware of the debate. The Government will have to give more publicity to the fact that a change is contemplated. For many people, especially those living in Scotland and in the north and west of England, the changes will have a great impact.

I hope that the Minister will deal with the basis on which the directive was made under article 100A. What happened when Ministers discussed the matter in Brussels? The exercise seems to be shrouded in secrecy. Of course, that is a characteristic of the Government. Little that they do is open, especially when they do not want us to know about it.

The Minister has a duty to tell the House what fight was put up and to give a categorical assurance that, before any other directive on summer time comes forward, the House will have an opportunity to debate at length the premise on which the matter comes forward, based as it is on article 100A, and the merits of summer time. If he gives such assurances, we shall certainly not divide the House. If he does not do so, he can rest assured that the matter will come back again and again, because of its serious implications for the way in which people live and for the constitutional issues that it raises.

8.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I begin with an apology—an apology that I owe to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor). I regret to say that I came into the Chamber a trifle late. Although I heard, I think, 95 per cent. of his speech, I missed the opening few sentences. I profoundly apologise to him. I hope that he will accept that I intended no discourtesy.

The House will accept that my hon. Friend set the tone of the debate. The points that he made have been echoed by several hon. Members, and they need to be addressed today and subsequently. My hon. Friend began by stressing the importance of the matter we are debating, and, in particular, focused on the choice of article 100A as the treaty base of the directive. The House has heard his arguments, and I shall seek to deal with them shortly.

My hon. Friend's arguments were supported by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who is concerned about the choice of article 100A as the appropriate treaty base. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East understandably drew attention to the concern of the peoples of Scotland and England, and in that particular he was powerfully supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) and other hon. Members, including the hon Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling). The people of Scotland's concern about this matter is serious, and we clearly must address it before we come to final conclusions.

I hope to explain why the Government have decided to take the action that we are now taking, and I hope that I will be able to reassure several hon. Members. But, before I address the particular points that I intend to address, it would be helpful if I were to spell out the nature of the directive and its consequences.

The proposal does not require that we make any change to our arrangements for summer time during the lifetime of the directive. It provides that the status quo shall continue for a further three years. Moreover, and because we are carrying out a review of our summer time arrangements, the directive enables us, if we so choose, to depart from the status quo and harmonise our dates with other member states during the lifetime of the directive. But again I stress that the choice is ours.

The directive provides that, for a further period of three years, 1990, 1991 and 1992, the existing arrangements for starting and ending dates of summer time will continue throughout the Community. Thus, as now, summer will start throughout the Community on the last Sunday of March, but, in the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic, it will end on the last Sunday after the fourth Saturday in October. In other member states, it will end on the last Sunday in September.

Continuation of the status quo in that way means that we are out of phase with other members states in two respects. First, we end summer time one month later than others, except the Irish Republic. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central has made observations about that matter with which I have considerable sympathy. Secondly, the effect is to place us in a different time zone from continental member states. We are, with the Irish Republic and Portugal, one hour behind central European countries.

The European Commission and other member states have never pressed us to change in that respect, but, because the Government have detected a widespread feeling in this country that more summer time might be beneficial to us, we have commissioned a review in which one option would be to move into the central European time zone. That would give us more summer time and, at the same time, enable us to harmonise time with the Community throughout the year. But that is an idea—we could properly describe it as an option—which the United Kingdom Government have brought forward. It is not an idea—it is not an option—which the Commission has either proposed or advocated. However, if adopted, it would enable us to meet the Commission's objectives of all states finishing summer time together if we left October as it now is.

Mr. Spearing: It might be right to clear up a point that I made, from which the Minister has not dissented. Whatever may happen between now and 1992, is it not a fact that, if we do not voluntarily harmonise in the way in which the Minister is suggesting may or not be possible subsequent to that date, by use, if it were chosen, of article 100A, we would be subject to the majority decision on the matter, as I outlined at the beginning of my speech? Is not the cessation of the regulation at the end of 1992 just as much an important feature of the proposal as any other?

Mr. Hogg: I can entirely understand why the hon. Gentleman raised that point. It is a bit premature to speculate on what might or could happen at that time. Clearly, several possibilities exist. One possibility is that, of our own volition, we might decide to move to central European time, in which case we would consider primary legislation. Another possibility—I stress that these are only possibilities, to meet a question from the hon. Gentleman—is that we might consider the possibility of moving the end date forward one month. That would require secondary legislation in this place.

We might—it is another possibility—decide to maintain the status quo. In that event, we would, it is true, require a directive to achieve that objective, but we might very well achieve it by persuasion. I would be surprised if we were unable to persuade member states to adopt a view which, in the end, we would wish to put forward.

There is a range of possibilities. As yet, the Government have come to no firm conclusion. The nature of the possibility that emerges at the end depends upon constitutional consequences. If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I cannot go down the road that he pointed me to, but I hope that I have given a fair indication of the kind of options that the House will have to consider after the expiration of the directive.

Mr. Darling: The Minister talked about the various options that the Government are considering, and the various options that might come forward. Can he tell us a little more about who is being consulted and what the nature and scope of the review is, or is it something that Ministers are discussing among themselves? Our concern is that all parts of the country are not being consulted and therefore have good cause to be concerned.

Mr. Hogg: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman on that point. I was going to come to it shortly, but this is as convenient a time to mention it as any other.

It is our intention to publish a consultation paper within the next few months, which will include the options that I mentioned in reply to the question from the hon. Member for Newham, South. We will publish the consultation document, which will open the discussion wide and will involve anybody, and I hope everybody, who has a view that they wish to express. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central asked me to give an assurance that there will be a wide discussion. There will be a wide discussion on the basis of the consultation paper and the Government will once again display their skill in their desire to ensure open debate on matters of major importance.

The treaty base underlying this directive is, I believe, the concern that has motivated hon. Members who have spoken in this debate. There have been other questions, but article 100A has been very much to the fore of the debate. It might be useful to remind ourselves that the first three directives were introduced under article 100 and, as the House knows, article 100 provides for unanimous decisions. The fourth directive and the present draft directive have been brought forward under article 100A which, as hon. Members have rightly pointed out, calls for and provides for a qualified majority.

As I have always believed in the power of persuasion, and I made my living from it for some time, I am not so pessimistic about these things as some hon. Members appear to be. It is worth reminding the House that the object of article 100A, as the hon. Member for Newham, South rightly pointed out, is to deal with measures that have as their object the establishment and function of the internal market. That is the phraseology that the House is bound to have in mind when we consider the appropriate treaty base.

Inevitably, the present draft directive and the fourth directive have to be read in the context of the first and second directives. Hon. Members will, I know, have studied this, particularly the hon. Member for Newham, South and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East. They will know from their study of the first and second directives that in the preamble express reference is

[Mr. Hogg]

made to the objective of facilitating transport and communication. That is the background against which we have to focus our considerations.

We have to ask ourselves whether we can sensibly say of this draft directive, or indeed the fourth directive, that it has an objective different from that which was the objective of the first and second directives, which we accepted. The House will, I think, accept that when one poses that question, one has to conclude that the objective of the present draft is the same—it must be the same—as the stated objective of the first and second directives and consequently what we are debating today is a draft directive that has as its purpose, or one of its purposes, the facilitating of transport and communication.

When I wound up the debate on the Summer Time Order 1988 on 28 April 1988, I said—I have made this point before—that I was not "irrevocably persuaded" that article 100A was appropriate to the directive. However, I also said that the matter needed "further consideration". I shall be candid, as I have always tried to be candid with the House. I was not then willing to make a concession as to the vires of article 100A. I had formed clear preliminary views, but I wanted to test those views once again before I made a concession, which I recognise is a concession that is likely to bind us, certainly with future directives of this kind, and perhaps with other directives. Therefore, I was extremely cautious because I did not want to make a concession from which I might feel that I subsequently had to resile.

We have done what I said that we would do. We have considered carefully the vires of article 100A, and whether or not this directive falls within it. Our careful, considered view is that the directive falls within the scope of article 100A. If we were to win and assert the contrary, as the hon. Member for Newham, South and my hon. Friends the Members for Tayside, North and for Southend, East want us to do, we would have to be able to say that the purpose of the directive was outside the scope of article 100A. We would have to prove that it was ultra vires. That means to say that we would have to establish that it was not a measure for the approximation of provisions laid down by law, regulations or administrative action in member states which have as their object the establishment and functioning of the internal market.

I do not believe that we could prove that article 100A was ultra vires partly because, in our judgment, it is intra vires, partly because, as a matter of evidence, we are stuck with the preambles to the first and second directives, and partly because, when we come to consider the consultation document, the House is likely to find that the views recorded in that document are to the effect that the present system of time is a constraint on travel and telecommunications. That will be a recording of other people's views and not necessarily, at that stage, the considered view of the Government.

Mr. Darling: Is the Minister already anticipating that, as a result of the review that we have not yet had, the majority of people will argue for the change that I suspect he wants? Surely, when we are considering the vires of this directive, it is for those who are promoting it to prove that it falls within the vires. I cannot see how the directive facilitates communication or transport, and I shall be interested to hear the Minister's comments. So far as I can see, it makes no difference.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is not focusing precisely on the question. The consultation document is only a consultation document. It is designed to open the debate as wide as possible, but it likely that a substantial number of views will be recorded in the consultation document to the effect that the present time systems are a constraint. I know that, because I have a broad idea what the likely terms of the consultation document will be.

This is yet another evidential problem in our way because, when there is a recording of views to the effect that the present time system is a constraint and we accept, as we must do, that the first and second directives have as their objective in the preamble the facilitating of communication and travel, we have great difficulty in arguing that this directive is outside the scope of article 100A. If we have to challenge that, we have to prove that it is ultra vires. The business of any Government is to form a view. The view that we have formed is that the appropriate treaty base is article 100A. That is not to say that it would be ultra vires article 100. It may be within article 100, but it is not ultra vires article 100A.

Mr. Bill Walker: As a non-lawyer, I sometimes find it difficult to follow what is ultra vires and what is intra vires, but does my hon. Friend accept that a change in the time system, so that we have a longer period of darkness in the morning in Scotland, will mean that we have more black ice on the roads? That is the greatest constraint of all on travel and transport. We have to face that every winter and, if we have one more hour of darkness, I can assure my hon. Friend that that constraint will be visible and noticeable.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North puts his case with considerable force. However, he would be well advised, before he rests on that argument, to consider in detail the views of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and to consider the documents that were available on British standard time in the early 1970s. The one point that was plain—which was mentioned in the last debate—was that British standard time resulted in a saving of lives and a reduction in injuries overall. It follows a fortiori that if British standard time had that effect, changing to central European time would have an even more pronounced effect.

Mr. Spearing: The Minister will probably agree with me on one point. Now that we are under a written constitution, the choice of articles and their interpretation are major legal matters. In justifying his choice of article 100A by earlier use of article 100, is the Minister suggesting that the two are conterminous? If they are conterminous, why is there a need of article 100A for derogation? That shows clearly that, in theory at least, there is some difference between the two articles, otherwise there would be no need for the A.

The Home Secretary sent me a letter dated today in which he said:

> "In our survey of summer time, we have received evidence, particularly from organisations dealing with Europe, that the present arrangements, and in particular different ending dates for summer time, impede transport end telecommunications."

That is the nub of the Government's case. Does the Minister agree that the present arrangements do not physically impede transport and telecommunications, because they cannot? They are an inconvenience and may be a social inconvenience. Habits may be an inconvenience between countries in the same time zone. However, impedance does not mean physical obstruction.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is fixated with the phrase "physical obstruction". The words he should use are "constraint" or "fetter" and constraints or fetters can take a number of forms. I have no doubt that in certain circumstances a difference in time zones which makes communication difficult or makes travel more complicated is a constraint or fetter that is capable of interferring with the proper performance of the internal market.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the letter he received from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, which makes my point that there is evidence. Evidence will be appearing in the consultation document and that will make it extremely difficult, once that evidence is recorded as a fact, to contest the vires of article 100A.

In making his second point, the hon. Gentleman was being less subtle than he is normally. Words such as "conterminous" are splendid, but they do not add up to much. But this point does add up: the preambles to the first and second directives state the specific objective clearly—the facilitation of communications and travel. That concept brings us four square within article 100A and this is within its scope.

Mr. Macdonald: Does the Minister accept that his words about what he expects will be in the consultative document have sent a chill through the Opposition and Conservative Members with a knowledge of Scottish constituencies? I shall return to my constituency and tell people to prepare for a Government directive—on which the Minister has already made up his mind—that will attempt to foist central European time on the people of Scotland. Will the Minister give us an assurance that the Government will not impose central European time against the majority will of the people of Scotland? I hope that the Minister will take the votes of Scottish Members as an indication of that majority will.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman does both me an injustice—although I do not suppose that he cares about that—and his constituents, because he intends to deceive them about the position. I made it wholly plain. I said that we were about to publish a consultation document which would set out the options. They include doing nothing, which is maintaining the status quo, bringing the end date of summer time one month forward or going into the central European time zone. The Goverment have come to no conclusion. We are putting out the options so that people can express their views and Parliament and others can form a clearer opinion as a result. If the hon. Gentleman speaks to his constituents as he has just spoken to the House, he will be deceiving them which I hope he will not do.

Mr. Macdonald: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hogg: I have given way sufficiently often and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is getting cross, which I have always found a compelling reason for sitting down. On that happy and conclusive note, I commend the Government motion to the House and ask the House not to accept the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East.

9.16 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor: With the leave of the House, I shall be brief.

We are grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for his usual courtesy in establishing the position. It is frightening constitutionally and means that the Government are saying that it must be article 100A if we cannot prove that it is not. That opens up a huge range. Secondly, they are saying that it is article 100A although the directive makes no changes and establishes the status quo. The Minister has been honest enough to tell us what the score is.

This is an important night for the constitution and I hope that every hon. Member, following the lead given by the Select Committee, will realise the dangerous constitutional issue that we now face and the whole series of legislation which is now sadly being transferred from here to Brussels. I hope that the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) will not warn his constituents about what a Conservative, Labour or Liberal Government may do, but will tell them that, sadly, in three years' time, irrespective of what transpires, the decision on what happens to them will be made by the Council of Ministers by majority vote. That is the real issue tonight and it is a worrying one.

Again I thank the Minister for being so clear. My five colleagues who signed the amendment are coming to the House at 10 o'clock for the debate and it would be discourteous to them to force this to a Division in their absence, so I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7876/88, on Summer Time arrangements; and supports the continuation of the existing arrangements for a further three years to enable the Government to consult and give careful consideration to future summer time arrangements.

Roads (Northern Ireland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

9.17 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): As I have heard that the Minister to reply to this debate is cross, I may temper some of my remarks because it will be twice in two consecutive weeks that I shall see him cross and I do not want that.

I welcome the opportunity to draw attention to a matter which is dangerous in a Northern Ireland context —as it would be in any other context—and that is the results of what is known as the Snaith report in relation to the abandonment of some rural roads in the north of Ireland. First, I should put the term Snaith in context. Those who have an abiding passion for the turf will remember the days when there was a jockey of that name, who never rode from the front, always won his races from behind and was never seen by the other jockeys until the post, when they were pipped. This one seems to be akin to the jockey. He seemed to come from nowhere, produce a report that nobody knew anything about, cause mayhem among the rural community and evaporate into thin air.

This is a dangerous report because it recommends to people in rural areas that some roads which they have used for generations will be closed because someone came from England, had a look and decided that farmers and people living there did not particularly need them. Perhaps I put the case cynically, but that is how it is viewed by those affected.

Several of my constituents were surprised, to put it mildly—shocked would not be an overstatement—when they got word from the roads executive that the road on which their house was built or adjacent to their land was being abandoned and that—believe it or not—they had a right of objection, although no one told them what would happen if that objection was received.

Somebody who replied to a parliamentary question about the Snaith report on behalf of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland said that it was to investigate the implications of adopting a positive abandonment policy in respect of low trafficked rural roads. Like many other people, I have great difficulty envisaging what a positive abandonment policy might be. It seems a remarkable contradiction in terms. It seems that a great deal of brain power has been used to arrive at such a definition of something as simple as abandoning roads and refusing to maintain them.

The idea of abandonment is bad for the simple reason that the North of Ireland is a rural country. Our biggest industry is farming. Most people who are employed—not that many are employed, of course—are employed in farming, and rural areas have always been the most stable part of the North of Ireland.

Among civil servants and others who advise Ministers in the North of Ireland, there has always been tension between spending on urban areas and pushing people into towns and keeping the rural infrastructure maintained.

Those of us who have lived to see the debacle of the creation of the new city of Craigavon, or rather the attempt to create a new city of Craigavon—a Milton Keynes in the middle of Northern Ireland—realise how silly and expensive it is and how counterproductive it is in human terms. Among all the economic and security problems and the problems of division, the rural community is one of the real stabilising factors.

I am glad that the Minister is here, as he is one of the people in the Northern Ireland Office who has realised the importance of what I and many others are saying. I should like to take this opportunity to thank him for taking a courageous decision about people in a very disadvantaged area of my constituency. They did not have a mains water supply. He made the sort of courageous decision that is required. Guidelines laid down by the Department are only that. They are designed to guide; they are not absolute. I ask the Minister to have a good close look at the Snaith report. If there is anything of advantage in it, that should be discussed. Above all else, he should discuss the issues.

I have here a copy of a letter which Armagh district council sent to the divisional roads manager in the Craigavon area. The divisional roads manager is assiduous in helping people and replying to queries, but he is in difficulty—he does not understand the Snaith report either, or he does not understand its context. The letter is dated 10 November. A reminder was sent by the clerk on 28 November, but there has not yet been a reply. I do not blame the divisional roads manager for that.

The letter asks three questions, the first of which is whether the traditional arrangements will be adhered to, and whether, if the district council receives objections to an abandonment, the proposal will simply stop. Secondly, is Armagh district council area being used as a pilot scheme? Thirdly, why were there no discussions with district councils and public representatives about something which was seriously to affect the lives of people, especially at a time when the whole thrust of EC directives is towards helping those in disadvantaged areas? I have no doubt that, following this debate, a reply will be received by Armagh district council. Will the Minister address his mind to those three specific points because they are the kernel of the matter and will be crucial for us all?

I was shocked when I received the figures for the road closures as of 31 October 1988. I want to compare like with like and shall use the figures for areas which are as rural as Armagh. I found out that one road was closed in Down district council area, two in Limavady, two in Omagh, three in Fermanagh, two in Dungannon, one in Ballymena and 23 in Armagh district council area. That seems to be more than a coincidence.

For that reason, people on Armagh district council—as I am—the clerk of the council, myself as Member of Parliament and all those affected are asking what we have done to deserve the attention of Mr. Snaith. I know that we are guilty of many sins of commission and omission, but I do not know of any that would merit this type of comparison with other district council areas. Will the Minister make some observations about that?

The matter does not stop at abandoning a road. It concerns people's livelihoods. As we know, farming nowadays is not a matter of driving a horse and cart up a lane. It is a mechanised industry, with combine harvesters. When the milk is collected, great tankers have to use the roads and if a road is abandoned it deteriorates quickly. What do farmers do then?

They are also being denied the provision of street lighting because of what I regard as a most remarkable anomaly in the administration of the North of Ireland. I want to take this opportunity to point the matter out to the

Minister. If I am wrong, I know that the Minister will correct me and, if I am right, I ask him to correct the policy.

A large proportion of the budget for street lighting in the North of Ireland goes towards lighting in privately developed housing estates, where a builder will make huge amounts of money from building and selling houses. He must lay down the roads and sewers at his own expense and provide the electricity, but the Department of the Environment puts in street lighting for him. I find that remarkable. I do not see any circumstances that justify that continuing. If people are building a development from which they will make a profit—as is their right—let them provide all the amenities and let them pay for providing the street lighting. That is reasonable. If it is not done, the very people to whom I am referring—those who live in isolated areas—who need lighting more than anyone else, will not receive it. One of the reasons why they are not receiving lighting now is the iniquitous policy I have mentioned.

I hope that the Minister will bear in mind that many of us have been pushing for an integrated rural policy for the North of Ireland. Such a policy has been formulated by the EEC and proposals have been set out. We must try to implement an integrated policy so that we can talk about the lives of those who live in isolated areas, not merely about roads, street lighting, infrastructure, water, sewerage or whatever. We must never lose the integrity of rural life in Northern Ireland.

9.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): I can assure the hon. Member for Newry and Amagh (Mr. Mallon) that I was cross only on his behalf. I realised that, having been in his place since 8 o'clock, mainly because I sent out messages to find him, he might have been looking forward to his dinner. After the kind words that he used towards me, I can say with even more force that I am certainly not cross.

In 1986, my Department, following many criticisms that it had received and following the many problems that it had faced, appointed Professor Snaith—he is not a snake in the grass in Newry and Armagh but an eminent consultant on transport matters and an authority on highway engineering—to examine road conditions in Northern Ireland and all aspects of the Department's road maintenance policy.

We have decided, for good and sensible reasons, to keep confidential some of the findings which he brought to our attention, but most of his suggestions which involved improvements to engineering practice my Department is implementing. Professor Snaith recommended that we should develop a system that would give priority to the most important routes in an economic sense, the roads which would have A and B classification, and achieve the best value for money. I have accepted his advice, and we shall give priority to the most heavily trafficked roads. These are the major inter-town routes and the accesses to the ports. I can assure the hon. Gentleman, however, that that does not imply that other roads will be neglected. Professor Snaith suggested that the Department should take a hard look at the entire road network. We have 14,500 miles of public roads in Northern Ireland, which, per head of population, results in the highest ratio for any comparable area in the United Kingdom.

We have the puzzling and bureaucratic phrase "policy for abandonment", which I let slip through the net instead of using my usual, fairly simple English. The issue is that we should concentrate on improving the maintenance of the existing road network and investigate the possibility of abandoning roads which have exceptionally low usage. I use the more elegant phrase that was adopted by the hon. Gentleman, which I am sure would be used by my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), the Under-Secretary of State for Industry, who I am pleased to see in the Chamber. As the hon. Gentleman knows, many of these roads are in sparsely populated areas.

I would hate to accuse the hon. Member for Newry and Amagh of gilding the lily in any way. To test the practical implications of giving up responsibility for these roads —perhaps that is a better term than "abandoning"—the Department decided to undertake a pilot study. It was decided that the study should take place in a country district, and the district selected was the one with the greatest concentration of roads that have exceptionally low usage. Unfortunately for the hon. Gentleman, the district happened to be in the area which he represents. It was for that reason only that the study took place in the Craigavon division of the hon. Gentleman's constituency. My officials did not go round threatening abandonment. They tried to find out what people actually thought about the proposals. Many of the roads do not have people living in them. Of course, as the hon. Gentleman said, they lead to farm buildings that are in use and that is why the pilot study was undertaken.

The results of the local consultations clearly showed that even the lightly trafficked roads serve a distinct need. Following the findings, I decided that the limited savings which might be forthcoming did not justify any change in our present policy. I hope that that will considerably reassure the hon. Gentleman. His constituents need not worry, as any proposal to abandon such a road would require consultation and general agreement. My Department has no intention of adopting a programme of withdrawal from the public road network in any part of Northern Ireland. Of course there will be some circumstances where it is perfectly sensible to give up a piece of road—for example, when a loop is taken out following some kind of realignment.

In the hon. Gentleman's constituency over the past five years nearly £5 million has been spent on major road works and a further £8·5 million worth of schemes are planned for the constituency in the current five-year programme. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that that represents a very large investment in the Newry area and underlines my determination to ensure that there is an improvement in the quality of life of all its citizens through the road network that we shall support and maintain.

We spend about £750,000 each year on minor works in Armagh and Newry and Mourne district council areas. That is fully comparable to any other constituency in the Province. In addition, we spend approximately £5·5 million each year on maintaining the roads, street lighting and car parks in the Armagh and Newry and Mourne districts. Of course I will bear in mind the important points that the hon. Gentleman made about street lighting. I thought that he perhaps slightly undermined his case when

[Mr. Richard Needham]

he reminded the House about horses and carts and the fact that farmers have tractors and harvesters. Horses and carts did not often have headlights, while tractors and harvesters do. I take the hon. Gentleman's point that we are talking about a balance between people living in urban areas and those living in the countryside. It is not very nice for kids to have to walk up dark lanes in the winter.

I hope that I have succeeded in allaying any doubts that the hon. Gentleman may have had about my determination to maintain to the highest standard the splendid asset of Northern Ireland's road network. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is also aware that we announced yesterday substantial additions to the funds that we shall spend—following Professor Snaith's report for which I give him credit—on the maintenance of roads in the Province over the next three years. Most of that money will be used for the upkeep of the main roads, but other parts of the network will obviously benefit as well. I am sure that we would all regard that as a sensible investment and a token of my Department's commitment to maintaining the efficient road system in Northern Ireland.

Of course I am happy to make available to the hon. Gentleman a summary of the principal recommendations by Professor Snaith and together with that tell him the action that my Department is taking to implement those recommendations. I will do that now.

I hope that I have reassured the hon. Gentleman about the position for his constituents. He is always meticulous in raising with me any matters that affect his constituents and I will always do my best in those circumstances to assist him and them. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me at this late stage in the evening, considering the possibility of our dinners, if I do not consider integrated policy but leave that for another day.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 2 December 1988

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Settle-Carlisle Railway

9.34 am

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I wish to present a petition bearing 2,049 signatures, sent to me, and collected, by Messrs Ian and David Rodham of Middleton in my constituency, and from David Marsden in Beeston —not a few yards away—which was in my constituency. The petition makes the point—which worries a lot of people, as we have learnt this week—that the Settle-Carlisle railway must be preserved and maintained. It is essential to the transport system from Leeds to Scotland. It is important for freight and for the hundreds of thousands of people who enjoy the scenery in that remarkable part of the world, crossing over into Westmoreland.

I humbly present the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I wish to present a petition signed by 2,000 constituents of Berwick-upon-Tweed and elsewhere in the same terms as that presented by the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees). It seeks the continuation, as part of the national railway network, of the Settle-Carlisle railway, which is an important part of our engineering heritage and a necessary part of the railway system.

I strongly support the petition. I would not wish to see the line go the way of the famous Waverley line in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), who is here beside me. I present the petition with my full support.

To lie upon the Table.

Parliamentary Accommodation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Neubert.]*

[Proposed subject for debate: First Report of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) of Session 1987-88 (HC 561) on New Parliamentary Building (Phase 2): The Next Steps.

Relevant documents: Second Report of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) of Session 1986-87 (HC 378) on New Parliamentary Building (Phase 2); Casson Conder Partnership, Phase 2 Parliamentary Buildings Design Study (January 1987); Property Services Agency, New Parliamentary Building Phase 2 Alternative Strategy (February 1988).]

9.36 am

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): This morning's debate provides an opportunity for the House to consider the recommendations made in the first report by last Session's Services Committee on what is generally known as phase 2 of the new parliamentary buildings; that is to say, the site bounded by Bridge street, Cannon row, Derby gate and the Victoria embankment.

Although I am Chairman of the Services Committee, I am not a member of the New Buildings Sub-Committee, and rely on my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) to keep me informed. This report is really the work of the New Buildings Sub-Committee, and I should like to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and his colleagues for their splendid work. Our thanks, too, are due to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) and his officials in the Property Services Agency, and to Casson Conder's project team, who have produced the two valuable design strategies before us today. It is the intention of my hon. Friend, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment to wind up the debate today—subject to catching your eye, Mr. Speaker—and respond to any detailed comments or questions which arise during the course of this debate.

Parliamentary accommodation has long been felt to be unsatisfactory. The Palace was first said to be overcrowded in 1852, the year of its opening. I know that, almost 140 years later, this is still the case.

Most Members have their own horror stories, but the plain facts and figures on overcrowding are contained in the the report before us today. In short, about 500 Back Benchers have access to only 150 single rooms. To some extent this overcrowding has been brought about by improvements in our other circumstances. The increasing office costs allowances of recent years have meant that Members have been able to employ more secretarial and research staff, all of whom add to the pressure on accommodation. Moreover, the increase in the Short money for the Opposition parties has already, quite naturally, enabled them to take on more staff to help them with their work. I understand, though, that it has simply not been possible to accommodate them near the Chamber.

The 1987 Services Committee report recommended that by 1995 every Member should have a room of their own, if they wanted one. The building work which is currently under way, and the proposed building under consideration today, should go some way towards this.

[Mr. John Wakeham]

It may be of help to the House if I summarise the general background to the Committee's report and the present activity. Over the past 30 years, many abortive schemes have been put forward for the Bridge street site. In 1960, the then Minister of Public Building and Works, now Lord Glendevon, announced that the Government had decided to apply for designation of the Bridge street site for parliamentary development. Prophetically, he added:

"As the House knows, this is bound to take a bit of time."

The House devoted much of its time and effort during the 1970s to discussing plans for an entirely new building, but the scheme eventually foundered owing to lack of money.

In 1978, however, the president of the Royal Academy, Sir Hugh Casson, and his firm, Casson Conder and Partners, were commissioned by the Department of the Environment, on behalf of the House, to conduct a further study into the Bridge street site. The objective was to retain and restore what was of quality, and replace the rest to a coherent design. In his report, Sir Hugh recommended that the most practical approach would be a phased development extending over a period of years. As a first stage, which came to be known as phase 1, he proposed the development of the area bounded by Parliament street, Derby gate, Cannon row and Bridge street.

As hon. Members will be aware, work on that phase is well under way and is broadly on schedule for completion in time for occupation at the end of the summer recess in 1990. When finished, it will provide accommodation for the research and public information activities of the Library, residential accommodation for the Serjeant at Arms and four other Officers of the House, all of whom presently live in the Palace. There will be offices for 60 Members and 100 Members' secretaries, as well as refreshment facilities and a parliamentary bookshop. Moreover, nearly 30 further rooms for Members become available in the Palace as a result of the transfer of Library and residential accommodation to the phase 1 site.

The temporary refurbishment for parliamentary use of the former Cannon row police station is taking place concurrently with phase 1 development, and is due for completion by summer of next year. Unfortunately, there have been delays to the scheme, caused most recently, I understand, by the listing of the building by Westminster council, but, when finished, it will provide office space for 41 Members' secretaries and about 20 research assistants, in addition to space for PSA and Crown Suppliers staff.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Am I to interpret that as criticism of Westminster council's decision to list the building?

Mr. Wakeham: Absolutely not. The hon. Gentleman was quite right to bring that matter to my attention if it sounded in that way. It certainly was not meant to be a criticism.

These developments will still leave about 100 Members without a room of their own. Thus, the report recommends that provision should be made in phase 2 for at least 100 Members' offices, together with additional space for Members' staff.

The most pressing task before the House today is to consider the design strategy for phase 2. The Casson Conder partnership has produced a design study for the site, and the PSA has put together an alternative strategy. The two are not in fact mutually exclusive, nor is the House being invited to approve or reject either strategy in toto. Elements of one could be combined with elements of the other.

There are common proposals in the two strategies. Both involve the rebuilding of Palace Chambers. That is unsurprising, as only the ground and first floors remain after the rest was demolished to relieve pressure on the supports holding the building over the underground railway. Both strategies adopt a refurbishment approach to Norman Shaw South and Nos. 1 and 2 Bridge street, because those buildings are listed.

Perhaps I should say at this stage that the word "refurbishment" does not just mean a lick of paint. Rather, it would involve restoring the original fine features of the building, both internally and externally, while bringing it up to modern office standards. So there would be as high a quality of finish and furnishings, and of the environment, in terms of heating, daylight, and so on, as if it were a completely new building.

However, there are some differences between the proposals. The Casson Conder proposals would raft over the underground railway at an early stage. The principal advantage of that would be a reduction in noise, and perhaps a better visual environment. But, on the down side, it would add about a year to the project timetable, in addition to the extra time needed to negotiate on air rights with London Regional Transport. The Committee believes that it is more important to press ahead with the first stages of phase 2, the rebuilding of Palace Chambers, and the refurbishment of Nos. 1 and 2 Bridge street. A raft could, if necessary, be added later.

The second difference in the proposals is over St. Stephen's House, which Casson Conder would rebuild and the PSA refurbish. No final decisions are needed on that just yet, as that stage of the project is some years away.

Mr. Dalyell: The right hon. Gentleman said that a raft can be added later. May we have some idea of the extra costs of doing it in double phase rather than in single phase? Would it not be significantly cheaper to do it all at once, or am I wrong?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The Chairman of the Committee and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, who will wind up the debate, know considerably more about the detail than I do, and have taken note of the point. We hope to answer that question in the course of the debate.

The third difference is that Casson Conder propose to move the underground station entrance to the corner of Bridge street and Cannon row; the PSA would leave it where it is. As moving the entrance would add substantially to the planning and construction time, the Committee feels that no change should be made.

For the sake of clarity during today's debate, it would be helpful if hon. Members could address at least their main remarks to phase 2. It is important that the momentum of the new building project is maintained. To do that, it would be helpful today to have the House's broad approval of the Services Committee's report and of its recommendations in paragraph 29 on the best way to make progress. Although the debate is, of course, on the Adjournment, it would be my intention, if the mood of the

House is largely in favour of making progress with this scheme, to table in the next few days a motion to approve the Committee's report, which I hope would then be taken formally one evening.

In brief, the recommendations of the Committee are to start work on phase 2 by carrying out preliminary design work on Palace Chambers, Nos. 1 and 2 Bridge street, and a feasibility study on a secure Bridge street subway to link the new buildings with the Palace. The PSA is ready to appoint an architect to carry out those studies, but nothing of substance can be done until the House's wishes are known.

Mr. David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Before the right hon. Gentleman leaves the subject of the subway, will he clarify one point that puzzled me on reading the report? Is the subway intended to serve all the buildings on the other side of the road? I speak as a new tenant and exile in Norman Shaw North. Accommodation there is extremely good, but access is unsatisfactory. Will the remit to the PSA include linking it by some kind of shuttle, as in the United States Congress? In the meantime, will the PSA consider subdividing the existing tunnel to provide slightly cleaner and more secure access for hon. Members?

Mr. Wakeham: The answer to the right hon. Gentleman's first question is yes. It is thought that it could be made to service all buildings on that side of the street. I am quite sure that the hon. Gentleman's other points will be taken into account by the Committee and by my hon. Friend. Obviously, practical possibilities will be looked at.

Mr. Dalyell: Paragraph 29 of the first report, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, uses the words

> "while bearing in mind the possibility of using part of the building for broadcasters' accommodation."

Have the Government any view on broadcasters' accommodation?

Mr. Wakeham: The Government have no special views on broadcasters' accommodation, and they are quite happy to consider any recommendations by the New Building Sub-Committee. We are entirely content with the report, as I am seeking to show.

The Government's intention, if the House approves the report, is to make the necessary money available for these studies, and for the subsequent detailed design study of Palace Chambers. Further work beyond that is several years away, and decisions on finance will be made at the appropriate time. At the moment, the costs of the phase 2 proposals range from £47 million for the PSA proposals—that is, making no allowance for a raft, rebuilding St. Stephen's or moving the station entrance—to £70 million for the complete Casson Conder proposals.

Before I close, I should like to comment on the general principles of phase 2. It is a longer rather than a shorter-term solution to our accommodation problems. All the buildings on the site, except Palace Chambers, are already occupied. Therefore, it follows that all work will need to be carried out in stages, with staff being decanted into completed buildings from buildings yet to be refurbished. Significant accommodation gains will thus come later rather than earlier in the development.

I hardly need remind the House of the importance of the site that we are discussing. It is close to one of the most famous and beautiful Victorian buildings in the world, and the Committee's 1987 report emphasised that

> "it would be most unfortunate if an insensitive and utilitarian building design were to be adopted on grounds of speed and economy".

But we should not be too extravagent either. When making up their minds on the proposed expenditure, hon. Members will no doubt bear in mind that this must be a question of competing priorities and that the expenditure, if agreed, would necessarily reduce public funds available for other purposes.

Mr. Dalyell: I do not quite understand from a reading of the documents how much excavation is still involved. Should not the House set some example to archaeologists who throughout London are deploring the way in which some possibly very important sites are being excavated by bulldozers?

Have the Government thought about their obligations towards archaeologists? This work could be very expensive, because it is time-consuming and uses expensive equipment. Anybody who talks about doing archaeological work had better understand that it creates financial problems for contractors. What thought has been given to what may be a most important site in terms of the history of London?

Mr. Wakeham: I am advised that we had an archaeological report on phase 1. The Government will be sympathetic to any recommendation made by the New Building Sub-Committee. It is for the Committee to consider what is necessary. The way forward recommended by the Services Committee would give us a gracious scheme of a fitting standard for our parliamentary purposes without making undue demands on the public purse. I hope that the House will welcome these recommendations.

9.52 am

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I thank the Government for making time available to debate this report which was prepared by the New Building Sub-Committee which I have the honour to chair. It is five years since the House last debated the new building project; given the level of interest and anxiety among hon. Members about their accommodation, that is far too long an interval. I am sure that the House will have taken note of what the Lord President said about a debate within the next few weeks if the House approves this report.

The Lord President has concisely summarised the contents of our report, and I shall not seek to cover the same ground. Instead, I shall concentrate on some matters of special concern. Before doing that, I should like to pay tribute to my predecessor, John Silkin, who became a member, and was Chairman, of the New Building Sub-Committee from 14 January 1981. I am sure that the House would like to place on record its appreciation for the services that he rendered to the House and especially to the Committee. All hon. Members have cause to be grateful to John Silkin for the work that he did on the Services Committee and for his enthusiastic commitment to the new building project. His successors will need to be equally enthusiastic and committed if phase 2 is to be a success. I should like to thank my fellow members of the Committee and the clerk for their able help and assistance during the 12 months that I have been in the Chair.

We all know and appreciate that there is a crying need for extra accommodation and better facilities for Members. I am not sure what the Lord President meant by

[Mr. Ray Powell]

his obscure reference to Brent. Perhaps he could explain it to me afterwards. Many hon. Members work in impossibly cramped and squalid conditions. As the Lord President said, about 500 Back Benchers have access to only 150 single rooms. In our report, we say that many hon. Members sharing rooms have only 60 sq ft of space each. We compare that to the 250 sq ft that comparatively junior officials in the Civil Service can expect.

The building in which we work is an architectural masterpiece, but it was designed for the part-time gentlemen MPs of the 19th century, who took a very relaxed view of their political duties. It was not designed for modern Members who quite reasonably require staff, space and facilities to cope with the burden of constituency work and the sheer hard slog of parliamentary duties. For some years I was well aware of the problems about accommodation, but it was not until I was appointed to the post of allocating accommodation to Opposition Members that I realised that the problem would be solved only when Members from all parties forced the Government to take more than a cursory interest in the early completion of the proposals that are before the House.

Mr. Dalyell: Does my hon. Friend know of a more thankless task in the whole Palace of Westminster than allocating accommodation to Opposition Members?

Mr. Powell: A more thankless task in this Parliament is that of the Government Whips who allocate accommodation for Conservative Members. That is because they have considerably more Members than the Opposition. The allocation of accommodation is a difficult responsibility, given the problems of Members about their work load. It is essential that we have no more slippages, no more excuses for pushing dates further and further ahead. We want action to advance completion dates and a sincere promise to ensure that hon. Members are accommodated. Even the Prime Minister should be told to give her customary stamp of approval.

When I tour the buildings looking for rooms that might have been overlooked or rooms that might be unused, or when a new Member is allocated a room and moved from the desks in the Cloisters, I inevitably look into the Oratory in the centre of the Cloisters. I do not know how many hon. Members have walked down there and looked into the Oratory. There are four hon. Members there with four desks and four filing cabinets and all their books and papers. They are cramped in a historical room where the death warrant of Charles I was signed. We might conclude that that is an unusual place and ideal for a new Member who could get a great deal of publicity when he is allocated a desk there. That is the only condition under which new Members will accept a desk there.

Four hon. Members, representing 250,000 constituents, should not be asked to work in such accommodation. Some elder statemen might say that, when they were elected, they had to wait years for a desk. I have not been elected all that long, but I had to wait four years for a desk. Together with 12 other Members, I squatted in rooms above the Chamber; we were told every week by the Serjeant at Arms that we had no right there because it was a writing room for Members and that we should not be using the desks. Nobody slept on the desks but we used to leave most of our documents there, and at least we had a desk to write on. As I am not going back all that many years and as I am not an elder statesman, it is clear that we have not progressed very far over the years with the allocation of desks.

We are nearing the 21st century and advancing into modern technology. We have young and enthusiastic Members who have been educated and trained in modern techniques, and we must ensure that facilities are made available for them so that they can house their computers and other advanced office machinery. Let us keep the Oratory for signing historical documents. It is no use increasing secretarial allowances so that Members can employ more trained staff unless we provide them with the basic necessities of an office and a desk. It is of little use to increase Short money for the Opposition unless that is coupled with the allocation of accommodation for staff.

It is of grave concern that the Government announce major programmes of legislation, adequately backed by increased spending from the Prime Minister's office down to that of the most junior Minister, yet give little if any consideration to providing the Opposition with increased accommodation for the extra staff that they need to deal with the extra work load that major Bills involve. I hope that some consideration will be given to this urgent matter.

Yesterday, there was a tremendous attendance of Members from all parties at a retirement farewell gathering for one of the staff. I place on record my wholehearted appreciation for the help that was afforded to me over the years by Miss Frampton. There is no doubt that she will be missed. Her knowledge of every desk in all areas throughout the Palace was formidable. I am sure that the House would like to join me in expressing our best wishes to her for a long and happy retirement.

Like many other hon. Members, I could record in great length and detail tales of actions taken by some to acquire desks and rooms for themselves, only to find eventually that they have to be evicted. I do not wish to delay the House with those tales. After the 1987 general election, the allocation of accommodation proved to be a tremendous problem. With only one exception from the Opposition's point of view, all other problems were eventually overcome, if not entirely satisfactorily, with all Members being allocated a desk. Undoubtedly this was due mainly to the tolerance and understanding of the Serjeant at Arms and his staff. I am sure that all hon. Members appreciate the help afforded them in 1987 after the June election, when so many had left the House and so many new hon. Members had been elected.

The House must surely appreciate that the lack of accommodation is not merely a minor inconvenience to a few hon. Members. Instead it is a major curb on the effectiveness of Parliament. I bustled into the office of the Lord President only this week and witnessed the activities that were taking place in such a cramped area. If it is not possible for the right hon. Gentleman to have reasonable accommodation in which to exercise his duties on behalf of the House, what hope is there for others, including Back-Bench Members? It is high time that we improved accommodation at all levels.

In the report we set targets for the provision of extra accommodation. We recommend that by 1995 every hon. Member should have a room of his own, if that is what he or she wants. We suggest that a minimum standard of 50 sq ft of working space should be provided for each Member's personal secretary. We say that that standard should be introduced as soon as phase 1 is ready for occupation in 1990. We recommend that high priority should be given to the provision of between 20,000 and 36,000 sq ft net for additional office space for Members' staff.

It is one thing to set targets, but quite another to achieve them. The history of parliamentary building projects is not encouraging. I am acutely aware that the prospect of a new building on the Bridge street site was first announced to the House more than a quarter of a century ago, yet we are now talking tentatively about the completion date for phase 1. I cannot respond in detail to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), but if we cannot complete phase 1—we want to couple phases 1 and 2—our grandchildren, if they become Members of this place, will be asking when they are to have new accommodation. I am sure that the Minister will respond to that issue in more detail.

It is difficult to avoid coming to the conclusion that successive Governments have paid only lip service to the need for improved accommodation. A further problem is that responsibility for design and construction rests with the Property Services Agency, which is not the most dynamic of public bodies, especially if Ministers do not exert the necessary political will to keep it up to scratch.

A recent example of repeated delays in the conduct of parliamentary building projects will prove my point. It is an example that has been a source of irritation to myself and my colleagues on the Sub-Committee for the past 12 months. The old police station at Cannon row is being temporarily refurbished for parliamentary use. This will provide a limited number of extra desks for Members' staff, which will be a modest but useful gain. The original completion date was late 1987. That slipped to mid-1988. It slipped again to the spring of 1989. We were told last summer that that was an unrealistic target. I hope that we shall be told today what the latest estimate is.

The Cannon row refurbishment is a small-scale project. If temporary refurbishment can take twice as long as was first estimated—during the period when cities of skyscrapers have been built in docklands—will work on the parliamentary site proceed at a snail's pace? We have a right to expect that phase 2 will be conducted with much greater urgency. I hope that the conversion project is an extreme example.

Progress has been made over the past five years. For example, phase 1 will provide considerable extra accommodation. There will be offices for 60 Members and 100 Members' secretaries. There will be catering facilities and a bookshop. We have been told by the Lord President that phase 1 is broadly on schedule for completion in time for occupation in October 1990, but I am a little suspicious of "broadly". I hope that he will confirm that there will be no slippage that will put the target date in danger.

When the Cannon row project and phase 1 are completed, much accommodation within the Palace will become vacant. The Library alone will vacate 21 rooms. Other staff of the House will move out of the Palace. The Sub-Committee is concerned that funds should be made available and plans drawn up so that the vacated rooms can be converted without delay. As we state in the report, it would be unacceptable if prime accommodation within the Palace were to lie idle for any long period because lack of funds for conversion. Perhaps the Minister can reassure us that attention is being paid to that recommendation.

Our overriding concern on phase 2 is that we should, as far as humanly possible, be able to proceed with construction work as soon as phase 1 is complete. That is why the Sub-Committee decided earlier this year, when considering the proposals from the Property Services Agency's consultants Casson Conder Partnership and from the PSA itself, to pursue a compromise approach. That is set out in the report and has been outlined by the Leader of the House. We have accepted that the underground station entrance should not be moved as Casson Conder wanted. We have deferred a decision on whether St. Stephen's house should be rebuilt or refurbished, and we have recommended that a deck over the underground, which would result in much improved working conditions for those who use the offices around the southern inner court, should not be built in the first stage of phase 2 but may be built later.

I must make it clear that I and my colleagues regard that compromise approach as the minimum that the House is likely to find acceptable. If the House accepts those elements of scaling down of the scheme prepared by the consultants—I accept that it may be necessary to do that—we have a right to expect in return that the proposals for phase 2 are proceeded with without delay and with ministerial guarantees on appropriate funding at every stage. I hope that the Minister will provide us with guarantees at the end of the debate. Perhaps he will also be able to assure us that the quality of accommodation that will be provided under phase 1 and 2 will be up to the standards that Ministers have recently provided for themselves and their civil servants further down Whitehall in Richmond terrace.

Phase 2 will have to proceed in stages, as so much of the site is already occupied. The logical place to begin is Palace Chambers, which is not only unoccupied but largely demolished and, in its present state, is a considerable eyesore. Fundamental decisions on the future of Palace Chambers will have to be taken within 12 months. Those include decisions on the use to which the building will be put, the choice of an architect—on which I trust that the Sub-Committee will be consulted in due course—and the preparation by the Sub-Committee of a detailed design brief.

The report makes specific proposals about the preliminary studies that need to be carried out by the Property Services Agency. Those proposals are in paragraph 29 of the report. We made a great effort to take evidence and agree on the report before the summer recess, so that essential preliminary work might begin during that recess. I understand that Treasury Ministers gave their approval in July for such studies to go ahead before the present debate. I was therefore disquieted to learn that after all that effort, no work was put in hand. Five valuable months have been wasted, either because of indolence in the Minister's office or because of bureaucratic time-wasting by the PSA. The Minister owes us an explanation for the latest delay and an assurance that the studies will now proceed immediately.

The studies outlined in paragraph 29 of the report include not only detailed work on Palace Chambers, but an examination of the uses to which Nos. 1 and 2 Bridge street could be put to pave the way for the next stage of phase 2. We also call for a feasibility study on a subway link between phase 1 and the Palace of Westminster. That is something that successive Services Committee reports have highlighted as a priority. The need for a proper

[Mr. Powell]

dedicated link with the new building will become urgent when phase 1 is opened in 1990. It follows that planning must start now and that necessary financial provision must be made in the advance budget.

I want to make three further points on phase 2. First, I want to sound a note of caution. Precisely because so much of the site is already occupied, the overall accommodation gains will not be enormous. We shall have to decant—I do not like that word, but we are using it now—people from one building to another to allow work to proceed. The gains will accrue later rather than earlier during work on phase 2, although we intend that a further 100 Members' offices will be provided by phase 2. I should mislead the House if I claimed that those offices will be made available in the first stage of phase 2. That is all the more reason to make the fastest progress that we can on phase 2, unhampered by Treasury penny-pinching.

My second point concerns the appearance of the building. The rebuilt facade on Bridge street will be of particular importance because it will face towards the Palace of Westminster and it will be seen by literally millions of tourists and visitors every year. It is at least as sensitive a site as the precincts of St. Paul's cathedral, which recently received some publicity. I think that the House will wish to be reassured that the New Building Sub-Committee has no intention of angering the heir to the throne by permitting the building of a monstrous carbuncle on the site. In our report, we suggest a restrained classical style which is dignified but does not seek to distract attention from the Palace opposite.

My third point is about the timetable. The Property Services Agency has been coy in giving us estimates about how long each stage of phase 2 is likely to take. The House will expect the Minister to give us precise information on that today. I have made a number of criticisms about the Government and the PSA and I ask the Minister to reply on several important points. I am sure that officials in the Box have taken careful notes.

I shall end on a more positive note. We should miss a great opportunity if we considered phase 2 merely as a way of providing new office space and refurbishing or reconstructing a few buildings. Together, phases 1 and 2 will provide us with a capacious, internally linked complex of buildings for parliamentary use within easy striking distance of the Chamber. Almost all decisions on the uses to which phase 1 buildings will be put have been taken, but that is not the case with phase 2. That means that we now have a chance to consider what facilities should be provided in phase 2, over and above basic office provision.

The New Building Sub-Committee and the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee have agreed to co-operate in a joint inquiry into the long-term need for the improvement of parliamentary facilities generally. We intend to consult widely within the House—initially, perhaps, by means of a request for submissions publicised through the all-party Whip and later by other means.

All manner of additional facilities have been suggested by hon. Members already. They include a swimming pool, a day nursery, a ladies' hairdresser, cash dispensing machines, a badminton court and rooms for Members' families. No doubt many more suggestions will be made, some practical and others less so. It will be our job to assess the level of demand in the House for particular facilities that we do not enjoy at present, and to allocate priorities. We shall take account especially of the need to offer the support of facilities that might be taken as standard by the end of the century when the new building complex will be in full operation. We shall report to the House on that in due course.

10.19 am

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): It gives me great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), the Chairman of our Sub-Committee, and to congratulate him on an extremely effective and wide-ranging speech. I associate myself with almost everything that he said, and I am sure that every other member of the Sub-Committee will feel as I do. It is a pity that more are not here today. That should not be regarded as a lack of interest but as underlining the needs that we are talking about. If Members had better facilities they could transact business from their offices which at present they must transact in their constituencies. I hope that the people in my constituency who expected me to be with them this morning will acquit me of discourtesy, just as I hope the House will if I disappear shortly after speaking in an attempt to catch up with what I should be doing in my constituency.

It is a long time since I spoke in the House on a new building. In 1973, on the only occasion on which I won a ballot for a private Member's motion, I decided that we should discuss the Spence-Webster building. The proposal then before us was for an enormous bronze glass and steel structure that would have dwarfed much of the Palace, would have been completely incongruous and out of scale and would have been a blot upon this part of London's landscape. It certainly would not have won an award from the Prince of Wales.

I was one of those who believed strongly that the site was so sensitive and this building so historic and beautiful that it would be wrong, merely to give Members luxury accommodation, to build something like the Spence-Webster building. I strongly opposed the proposal, and I was glad that we were successful. I was even more glad when Sir Hugh Casson, to whom tribute has properly been paid by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and by the hon. Member for Ogmore, came up with the scheme for phase 1 which is now, happily, very much under way. May I say to my right hon. Friend, whose interest in and strong support for the scheme cannot be in doubt, that we hope that "broadly" means on target.

Mr. Dalyell: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I admire him for all the work that he has done on this subject. I understood the Leader of the House to say that the Casson proposals were half, but not quite, exclusive of the other proposals. I should be interested, because I respect him greatly, to hear the hon. Gentleman's views on the Casson proposal. Is he wholly in favour of it?

Mr. Cormack: Perhaps I may deal with that in a moment. This morning I am speaking in support of the recommendations of the Services Committee and the New Building Sub-Committee. I believe that we have got it about right.

I paid tribute to the innovative work of Sir Hugh Casson and his partners in coming to the rescue of Parliament. When we had abandoned the Spence-Webster building for all sorts of reasons—aesthetic and financial—we still had a problem. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has described the problem in graphic terms many times. I shall never forget his account of prowling the corridors of Westminster looking for accommodation and coming upon a man pressing his trousers in an enormous subterranean room somewhere in the House of Lords. But that is not entirely apposite to this debate.

Sir Hugh Casson and his partners created a sensitive scheme that would use the facades, and where possible more than the facades, of buildings that were already listed or deserved to be listed. The scheme would not be out of scale and would not commit the heinous sin of so much modern architecture of being ill-mannered to the buildings that surround it. Sir Hugh and his partners performed a signal service in that regard.

We cannot allow to come out of this debate the suggestion that this is a group of parliamentarians intent on personal extravagance. One occasionally reads comments about Members wanting to look after themselves. It is amazing how many people believe that we do not pay for our own food here, and how many believe that we have some mysterious expense account and that when we entertain them to lunch it is paid for by the taxpayer. In fact, we pay for it, and cannot even claim it against tax.

We are talking about giving our constituents a better service. I entered the House in 1970 and for some time shared a room with seven other Members, including the former Labour Chief Whip, now Lord Cocks. We were of different parties. We were extremely friendly and got on well together, but how could either of us hold a detailed telephone conversation on a confidential matter sitting three or four feet away from each other? It was impossible. If a Member is to look after his constituents properly, he must have soundproof, decent—not lavish—personal accommodation.

During the long recess, I had the honour to be a member of the British delegation that attended the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in Canberra. We held our meetings in the new Australian Parliament building. It is a magnificent building, and Australian Members of Parliament have been looked after in a way that touches on the extravagant. I looked at their suites of offices with more than a little envy. We propose nothing like that here. At the end of the day, be it 1995 or a little later—I hope that it will not be later—the Members of the British Parliament will not have accommodation that begins to equal in opulence the accommodation that is provided for Members of the United States Congress or Senate or the Australian Federal Parliament. We should remind ourselves that those legislatures meet far less frequently than we do. That is another point that people should take into account. We at Westminster meet for far longer periods than almost any other legislature.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): That is because there is too much legislaton.

Mr. Cormack: That is one of my hobby horses, but I shall not disturb the all-party accord and my lavish praise of the Government by talking about the excessive amount of legislation in the Queen's Speech. That would be to enter a slightly discordant note, which is not what we are about this morning. Every Government, of whichever party, have broken their pledge to cut legislation. For many years, we have been kept here five days a week for 36, 37 or even 38 weeks. Members of Parliament may sometimes rightly be accused of lack of judgment, bad behaviour and all the other things of which we are guilty, but few of us could be accused of slacking. Most hon. Members, irrespective of party, try to give a good service to their constituents. Most Members are here because they have a vocation for public service. Although that might sound a little prissy and pompous, it is true. Many hon. Members gave up far better renumerated occupations outside to come here.

It is monstrous that many of the able new Members who came here last year will not have individual rooms until 1995. Not only are they being frustrated in many of their personal ambitions, but their constituents are being deprived. It is important to get those things on the record in a debate like this.

We enjoy an enormous privilege in being able to work within this historic Parliament and I have always been among the forefront of those who criticise vociferously any suggestion that we should abandon this place and move out. However, we must remember that this building was created, as the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) reminded us, in a different age for a different type of Member representing a different type of constituency. The building was created before the age of universal suffrage when there was not the relationship between a Member and his constituents that exists now or the variety of jobs that a Member is now expected to do for those constituents. One does not have to go to the extremes of Lord Palmerston who, in order to represent Newport, had to promise never to go near the place.

In the 19th century, when the building was opened, Members would pay irregular and infrequent visits to their constituencies. Those knights of the shires who resided in the counties came and went, but they did not come and go with enormous boxes of letters imploring them to help with housing and pension cases and all the other things that Members are asked about today.

We should also remember that the building was opened long before the age of the telephone. I believe that it was well into this century before a telephone appeared in this Palace. We must also remind ourselves of those facts when we consider the needs of the modern Member.

No modern Member can conceivably perform a proper job and serve his or her constituents in the fullest way without reasonable accommodation. I am fortunate to have had a room for some years and I pay tribute to my colleagues who exist in the Cloisters with just a desk or those who share a room. It is even unsatisfactory to share a room with one Member. For some years I shared a room with my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) when he was the hon. Member for Petersfield. We were the closest of friends and we got on extremely well together. However, we found it so impossible to do our work that we worked out a rota: I had the room for certain hours of the day and he had it at other times. That was not satisfactory.

We should not be in two minds about this. It is important that phase 1 is on time. It is absolutely vital that there should be no slippage. It is crucial that phase 2 should be proceeded with and that the momentum, as my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council said, should be maintained. No Government should be allowed to get away again with the argument that this is excessive

[Mr. Cormack]

public expenditure. It is expenditure for the public, so that the public can be served better by those they send here regardless of party.

I would deplore it if my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment in replying to this debate said that there was any doubt about meeting that modest 1995 target date. By the turn of this century, it should be an historic memory that Members of the British Parliament once had to exist in conditions of squalor, which would send most ordinary workers quite rightly yelling to the factory inspectorate, and which would cause strikes up and down the land if any private employer tried to insist that people with confidential and important work to do had to do it in the conditions that many of us have to endure.

I hope that we shall receive a good answer from the Minister. I hope that the answer tells us that the Government support, as my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council made plain, the Committee's report to the letter and are determined to support it fully in spirit. I am confident that we shall receive such a reply today. The time for delay has long passed.

When this building was created, it was created not only as a building for the British Parliament; the aim was to create a building which would speak of and for Britain, which would help to tell the story of Britain and would exemplify in every last detail the very best of British craftsmanship. Although we sit in a Chamber that was built after the devastation of the war, we still sit in a beautifully constructed and elegant Chamber. When we wander around the rest of the Palace, as we do so often, taking our constituents around they always remark on the brass work by Hardman of Birmingham, the wonderful stained glass and the incredibly beautiful carving in the House of Lords and elsewhere. They look with interest at the pictures which tell the history of Britain.

Obviously I am not suggesting that there should be any attempt across the road to replicate what we have here. That cannot happen. However, the spirit of what we have here should be reflected over there. I declare an interest because I have the honour to be Chairman of the House of Commons Works of Art Committee which has responsibility for the works of art in the building. We are constantly trying to conserve what we have and to add to it. Hon. Members will perhaps have admired the conservation of the murals in the Upper Waiting Hall. We do our work with a few thousand pounds: we do not even reach five figures. Recently we were able to unveil a bust of Ernest Bevin and we accepted the gift of a bust of Parnell. Throughout the Palace we want to see constant reminders of those who have helped to mould this place and create its history.

I have discussed these matters with my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore—and in his capacity as chairman of the New Building Sub-Committee he is very much my hon. Friend. When we go across the road, the New Building Sub-Committee and the Works of Art Committee should work closely together. Just as it is important that the building should be sensitive to its surroundings, so its contents should be equal in interest, if not in intrinsic value to the contents of this place. I hope that we will be able to commission young contemporary artists just as our Victorian predecessors did.

I am not suggesting that we should subject Members to avant-garde work which they might find it difficult to understand, although that might not do them a great deal of harm occasionally. However, just as in this building the story of Britain is depicted, so perhaps in the new building Britain itself might be depicted. What better than to commission artists to paint landscapes of the various parts of the country or commission a series of living or recently deceased parliamentarians to compliment studies in this place? What better than to commission tapestry weavers? We can do all that within a relatively modest budget if we patronise young, living artists. There are many distinguished artists whom I am quite sure would be prepared to negotiate special terms for the honour of having their work displayed here, just as their Victorian predecessors did.

I hope that we shall concern ourselves increasingly with the building and its contents so that it will be truly worthy of our Parliament and so Members in their individual offices can have the benefit of a little inspiration on their walls as well as a computer on their desks. All those things can be done and Members can be involved, perhaps by enlisting the support of colleges of art within their constituency, if we are imaginative.

Mr. Dalyell: When I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to Dick Crossman when he was Lord President, he wanted pictures for those marvellous offices at 70 Whitehall that the Lord President has, and I managed to fish out what was deemed suitable—the beautiful portrait of Halifax the Trimmer. Since then there has been a succession of pictures of admittedly second-class importance which had not seen the light of day for a long time. Should not some of them be taken out of storage and put in the new offices?

Mr. Cormack: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's sentiments—we are at one on that—but he will find that there have been many changes since those days. The Government picture collection under Dr. Wendy Baron has been extremely well managed. Many of the works that he speaks of have found their way on to the walls of embassies or consulates, and when I saw the store recently it was not very full. We have brought works of art from the store to the Palace and it is right that we should. We should also pay a thankful tribute to the National Portrait Gallery, which has been so generous with some of its surplus pictures and has allowed us the portraits that hang along the Committee Corridor. The interiors of phases 1 and 2 merit careful, detailed, sympathetic consideration and should show the beauty of 20th century Britain as this building speaks of 19th century Britain.

The hon. Member for Ogmore made a good point about the Oratory. I hope that we can free it by removing the desks and make it the small museum that it should be to one of the most historic events in British history. It is a sad event, which we may interpret differently, but a seminal occasion which should not be forgotten in a welter of papers and clutter of desks. It should be somewhere which parliamentarians can visit and to which, with appropriate arrangements, from time to time take small school parties. As the hon. Gentleman rightly reminded us, it was in the Oratory that the death warrant of Charles I was signed.

I have said enough to show my support for the Committee on which I am pleased to serve, my delight at the Lord President's welcome acceptance of our recommendations and my expectation that my hon. Friend the Minister will not disappoint us when he replies. I hope that he will assure us that "broadly" means on target, that there will be no spurious financial considerations to deprive the public of the service that they have a right to expect from their Members of Parliament and that, as we move towards the completion of phases 1 and 2, we should give proper, detailed consideration to the contents of the building, just as our predecessors did to the contents of this one.

10.43 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I strongly support the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) on many of his points, but particularly on two. First, for heaven's sake, this is not about the personal extravagance of Members of Parliament who want to build cushy facilities for themselves. All of us are a little sensitive about that. This morning we are talking about a decision for Britain, and I make no apology to anybody in my Linlithgow constituency for not being there while the House of Commons discusses this matter, because it concerns the prestige of Britain and her good name.

Secondly, I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the possibilities for patronage of young British artists. That is of enormous importance and I hope that a great deal of trouble will be taken. I should like to hear from the Minister what the Government's thinking is on the patronage of young British artists.

I was glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) mentioned the work of John Silkin, especially as this week some of us attended the memorial for Sam Silkin at the Temple church. Those two brothers made remarkable, although different, contributions to the House of Commons over many years and it was fitting that my hon. Friend should pay that tribute. I was also glad that he paid tribute to Mary Frampton. She had many functions, including serving writs on distinguished trade union leaders. Apparently her formidable figure was the armed force in the House of Commons and doubtless she did the job better than anyone else could have done—not that I am in favour of serving writs on trade union leaders. She performed many other tasks of an unofficial nature. When I was presented with several jojoba plants for having spoken strongly in favour of ecology, I went to Mary Frampton to look after and water them before I could take them home to Scotland. Many other hon. Members have similar memories of her kindnesses. She was a distinguished and good servant of this House.

The work of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore may be unsung, but his colleagues should thank him and the Committee sincerely for doing what may be a thankless task but one which someone must do and which is important. We are grateful to him for the long hours he has spent on the issue.

My history in these matters was briefly touched on by the hon. Gentleman. Within weeks of coming here, bereft of accommodation, I had the effrontery to carry out a survey of the Palace of Westminster over three nights with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who at that time was not right hon. As a result I wrote a long article 2,500 words, for *Architects Journal*. No one took much notice of it until three weeks after its publication when the *Daily Mirror* discovered that I had alluded to the fact that we had found a man in his underpants in 590 sq ft of prime space, pressing his trousers. The discovery was not to my political advantage because I was immediately tagged as the man who discovered the man pressing his trousers. I remember vividly two distinguished knights of the shires, Sir Henry Stodholme and Sir Otto Prior Palmer, pointing me out and saying, "That's the fellah who found the man pressing trousers in his underpants."

Fame comes in strange ways. The absurdity and yet the non-absurdity of that encounter reached the headlines. About a month later the then Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, passing me in the corridor looked up and said, "Dalyell, was he pressing his trousers to Royal Scots Grey standard?" The accommodation problem had even reached Downing street by then.

I should like to ask a series of specific questions. The first is prompted by that series of visits round the building a quarter of a century ago when I was critical of the House of Lords' space and accommodation.

Now I ask a reverse question. I am one of those who acknowledge that the House of Lords works extremely hard. There are more and more working peers. Some of their accommodation is very unsatisfactory. I do not suggest that the House of Lords has anything like a prior claim to the building that we are discussing, but is it intended, as a knock-on effect, that there should be rather better accommodation for working peers?

Secondly—I speak with feeling here, as it concerns the Library—I strongly register the opinion that as far as possible the Library should be concentrated in this building and that, where possible, those scholars—for such they are—who work in the Library should be allowed to work near us rather than in the proverbial outer Mongolia. I pay tribute to Dr. John Poole who has recently left the service of the Library. To many Members, Dr. Poole was an extremely able and helpful Library scholar. We have had cause over two decades or more to be grateful to him. He and his section were recently moved out of their position in the Library and sent over the road.

It is not right and proper to go into the reason why Dr. Poole retired from the Library service. I just register the point that it would have been very much better if the science section were accommodated in this building near to Members rather than over the road. Library accommodation is a priority. The Library staff should be near Members rather than over the road. Facilities that are consequential on the Library's needs should be made available over the road.

Thirdly, I hope that the Minister will say something about the nature of the competition. The documents do not make clear how the architects are to be chosen. My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore said that the building is to be in a restrained, classical style. It will certainly be on a prestige site. Has the Department worked out how that is to be achieved and what the form of the competition is to be?

Fourthly, I foresee enormous difficulties over what is called "decanting." I refer to paragraph 28(ii) of the report, which says

> "(ii) that decisions should be taken as part of a coherent strategy for the Phase 2 site as a whole. All buildings on the site, apart from Palace Chambers, are currently occupied by Members and officials of the House, or by broadcasters. It will therefore be necessary to proceed by means of a staged approach (as is accepted in both sets of proposals) in which

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

> occupants of each building to be developed are "decanted" to other parts of the parliamentary estate to allow work to proceed."

I have had recent constituency experience of the decanting of one general hospital, Bangour, to another site at Livingston. Decanting big areas of sophisticated work is very difficult. I am not saying that it is as difficult as decanting a hospital, but how much thought is being given to the mechanics of decanting? I foresee that a great number of my colleagues will be extremely vexed about the kind of things that might happen to them.

Fifthly, I do not see very much reference in the documents to the needs of the visitors that all hon. Members receive. For example, could not some provision be made for those who have to queue for a long time in rather cold conditions? Could not some cover be provided for those who have to queue outside when it is often wet and cold? I find it embarrassing to see people queueing to get into the Strangers' Gallery when the weather is wet and cold. Could not their needs and facilities for visitors in general be taken into account?

Sixthly, what is to be done about the long-term fabric of the building? Any building has to be constructed taking into account its functional use and the long-term maintenance of its fabric. I hope that you will not rule me out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I say publicly now that the day before yesterday, having endlessly raised with the authorities the stone rot of the Crypt, particularly around the font, I took my friend, Frank Bracewell—an expert from the Central region of Scotland—down to the Crypt chapel where he saw evidence of stone rot in the Welsh marble font that ought to be attended to. I throw that in, because it is not entirely irrelevant. I hope that something will be done about it. The general question that nevertheless remains is the quality of the fabric of the building.

Seventhly, hon. Members have cause to ask questions about exercise facilities. Over a quarter of a century ago I went, together with colleagues, to see the late Sir Paul Chambers about ICI Dyestuffs at Grangemouth. He said, "The trouble with MPs is that they are unfit. You get too portly and fat." That was true. I asked him what we should do about it. "Oh," he said, "you can have our squash courts." For over 20 years some hon. Members, from 8 to 10 o'clock in the mornings, have benefited greatly from the ICI squash courts. They have now been demolished. The squash players, of whom I ceased to be one last year, were then moved to the Civil Service building. Sir Robin Butler, the Cabinet Secretary, who is a regular squash player, told me last week that he thought that the courts are to be closed. He asked me where people would be able to play squash. It is not up to me to offer facilities to the Cabinet Secretary to play squash, but I am entitled to ask what sports facilities will be provided in the new building. If neither the Civil Service nor the ICI squash courts are available, could courts be made available to Members of Parliament within the foundations of the new building? That might not be too difficult.

The foundations bring me to the next issue that I raised in an intervention. What exactly is being done about the archaeology? The House of Commons has to set an example. We cannot lecture people in the City about not taking care of the archaeology of London, or Baynard castle, or whatever the issue of the day may be, if we do not take care of it ourselves. It will be a pity if achaeological work is not carried out towards the end of Horseferry road. The site of the new building may be important in archaeological terms. What thought has the Department given to archaeology during the site investigations that are bound to take place?

Ninthly, I return to the question of accommodation for broadcasters. Any hon. Members who go to No. 1 Bridge street must see that those who work in Parliament as broadcasters do their job in completely unsatisfactory accommodation. No. 1 Bridge street is hot, stuffy and overcrowded. The report refers in various places to accommodation for broadcasters, but the detail is left in limbo. I am not trying to curry favour with broadcasters, but they are an essential part of the working of Parliament. They must be given proper working conditions—conditions that hon. Members are demanding and will continue to demand for constituents who work in factories. The same goes for IRN which has really pokey accommodation at the moment. It would be useful to hear exactly what is to be done. I am not asking for a palace, but for decent healthy conditions for the broadcasters.

Finally, my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) knows exactly what I am asking for, and we are on delicate ground, but will there be a little room set aside for a few instruments that our Prime Minister thinks are very good for other people? Will there perhaps be a polygraph room? Perhaps it could be called the polygraph room in the Cheltenham memorial suite, as that would be a good name for it. Perhaps the cabin could be called the Westland cabin. I make the point that people who ask for facilities for other people had better look at the mote in their own eye. On this occasion I shall leave it at that.

11 am

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): First, I want to comment on one or two things I have heard during the debate. In his opening remarks, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House quite properly urged us to address ourselves to phase 2 and to the details of the report, but I do not feel that we should debate in isolation the design of particular buildings as that might lead us to overlook the possibility of transferring things from here to that building. If we take that approach, we may well overlook the need to discuss the budget required for the contents of the building, as how we equip the new accommodation for hon. Members is absolutely vital.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) said that he felt that Conservative Members have more difficulty with accommodation and made the observation that the more Members there are, the greater the accommodation problems. I wonder whether he was working up to a justification of what happened in Govan as being an accommodation manoeuvre. My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) drew our attention to the fact that longer sessions are held here than anywhere else in the world. I echo the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) that perhaps we legislate too much in this place.

However, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South did not draw the attention of the House to the fact that we meet for more days in the year and that we have longer days than other parliaments. If we had fewer days and fewer hours perhaps that would reduce the pressure. Dare I suggest that we have the largest legislature in the democratic world. Some would say that if we had fewer Members that might help. Therefore it is not just a matter of buildings evermore.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) quite rightly observed that the prestige of Britain is at stake, but he did not tell us whether his discovery of gentlemen without trousers in the other place was better or worse than the recent discovery of young ladies in the basement, which a Labour Member had the pleasure of knowing something about.

While I freely admit that I have not been here very long, the views of newcomers are quite significant, particularly when the newcomers are full-time Members of Parliament who work here throughout the week and throughout the year. The shock of what I encountered in terms of accommodation is still very fresh in my mind. Unlike hon. Members who have been here for a while, I have not seen things get better, therefore I cannot fall back on thinking that it is not as bad as it was. I am still being asked by my constituents what are my first impressions. When I tell them about the working conditions, either they think that I am joking, or they are shocked to find that the person they elected to represent them is unable to do his job.

I shall mention some of the things that shocked me as a new Member. Perhaps it might help the Sub-Committee when finalising its plans to know the issues which we hope they will attend to. The question of privacy which has already been mentioned is clearly first in my mind. Newcomers cannot have a confidential meeting anywhere except the draughty corner of a corridor, where we hope nobody will overhear. We cannot make telephone calls privately unless we are prepared to leave the office and risk being run down by the traffic to make a 10-minute journey to a telephone booth to call someone back and have a private conversation. Above all else, there is no chance of quiet thought so that we can gather our wits together when we need to come here and speak.

Although our personal conditions are inadequate and the shock that that caused is still clear in my mind, I was more shocked by the conditions under which I had to ask a secretary to work. The working space is not only communal with no privacy, but in most cases it is cramped beyond belief. One has to take one's life in one's hands as one negotiates an office without tripping over cables, and it is impossible to make oneself heard on the telephone because of the clatter of typewriters in the background. On many occasions it is quite impossible for a secretary to make anything remotely like a confidential telephone call on behalf of an hon. Member.

As a newcomer, perhaps because I am in Abbey gardens rather than in the Palace of Westminster, not only am I a long way away, and if I wish to collect papers from the Library it is a 20-minute journey if traffic is bad, but it is easy to be anything up to half a mile away from my staff. The report draws attention to the advent of electronic mail which would make it less important that staff are a long way away. I am still looking for the electronic mail that might help with that problem. I was also shocked that the technological revolution of which we are so proud in Britain seems to have passed Westminster by. It has been said that it took a long time for telephones to get here. With the exception of a fairly rudimentary service offered by the Post Office, the fax revolution has not even entered the portals of this House.

Mrs. Gorman: Unless hon. Members buy their own.

Mr. Wilshire: Exactly. My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay says that we should buy our own, but that clutters up the place with more telephone lines and makes life more difficult for everyone.

Most offices and large groups of people have effective paging systems. That does not seem to have reached us. I mean no disrespect to the Badge Messengers who do a magnificent job, but it would be far simpler to track us down by electronic paging than by walking miles to see whether we are here and can be given a message.

When I first arrived, I was pleased that the allowances were improving, but then I discovered that the allowances were a means of opting out of offering help with equipment. This is not a plea for something as well as allowances, it is almost a plea for equipment instead of allowances. By the time one has bought one's own typewriter and computer and realised that no one else has quite the same equipment, hon. Members we caused a remarkable amount of trouble. It takes me about half an hour to find a stationer's shop to track down a ribbon for my typewriter, because no one else seems to use the same model.

I was also shocked at the lack of recognition of our anti-social hours and unhealthy lifestyle. As a newcomer, I am regularly kept here for very long hours and find that if there is a running Whip it is quite impossible to get away even for a short time. Yet the concessions for trying to maintain family life, and the opportunity to buy necessities are virtually nil. If one is pinned down in this place, having broken one's toothbrush in the morning, and if the Whips do not smile sweetly at one, it is quite difficult to get out and find a shop that sells them.

As has also been mentioned, the lack of exercise facilities is staggering. Apart from the gym, the opportunities for exercise include the ability to exercise one's trigger finger in the rifle range or one's drinking arm in assorted bars. Beyond that, I fear that I am becoming ever less healthy as time goes by.

As others have said, the cynical will take speeches of this sort as a plea for plush surroundings and more perks for Members of Parliament. I do not intend now or in the future to apologise for saying these things. We should not apologise for asking for sensible working conditions. My constituents who learn the truth think that something needs to be done about it. They do not like huddles in the corridor, or me having to telephone them from a telephone booth down the corridor or finding that they cannot make themselves heard on the telephone to my secretary over the clatter. My family do not think it is unreasonable to ask for better working conditions, particularly when there is a running Whip and there is no place to meet them or eat with them because everywhere is overcrowded and overbooked. Similarly, because of the lack of exercise facilities, my doctor would not think it an unreasonable request if he knew how unfit I was becoming.

The vital parts of the report are paragraphs 28 and 29 —"The Next Steps". Paragraph 28 rightly invites us to comment on three principles—keeping up the momentum of development, ensuring that the next phase is comprehensive and, as has been discussed already, the quality of the buildings. Paragraph 29 makes three correct calls for action—doing design work on Palace chambers, doing a study on the uses of Bridge street and looking at the feasibility studies for a subway.

[Mr. Wilshire]

The three principles in paragraph 28 are absolutely fine as far as they go. I suspect that it is the principle of keeping up momentum about which I feel most strongly. Phase 1 is, I hope, nearing completion and phase 2 has simply got to carry on immediately after, without any break. Until phase 2 is complete we shall not reach the key objective of obtaining a single room for every Member who wants one and secretaries' accommodation that is civilised and located near to the Members for whom they work and in which they can hear themselves think.

Even if the scheme is comprehensive, we shall end up with discussions about whether we have too much accommodation and are we overdoing it. Those of us in Abbey gardens and Dean's yard would say that if, mysteriously, there is too much accommodation in phase 2, or phase 3 if there is one, there is plenty of scope for giving up things that are too far away and unsuitable.

I hear what is said about the quality of the building and support the approach that we must do nothing that would upset the Prince of Wales. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that the speed of completion of the project and the cost are relevant. I am not making a plea for quick, cheap and nasty building, but, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, we should not be too extravagant and should not lose sight of the fact that the speed of completion is an important issue as well as ensuring that the quality of the building is as it should be for such a sensitive site.

The suggestions in paragraph 29 are fine as far as they go. However, they will not result in a single new facility. The calls for action do not include a detailed timetable for the work to start and finish. I hope that when the Sub-Committee considers this further it will extend the calls for action and add details of the new facilities and a strict timetable so that we all know where we are going.

When focusing on the question of action, I should draw attention to the point about the use of Nos. 1 and 2 Bridge street. To a certain extent, we could extend that discussion to the use of Palace chambers as well as the feasibility study there. There are some uses which were identified in the first report of the previous Session but which have not been mentioned this time. I draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to that and invite him to comment. There is mention of a book shop but I have not been here long enough to discover whether it is intended that it should carry stationery items so that we can save time and run our offices efficiently. I see no mention of whether the use of Bridge street could include some sort of small shop to supply us with the necessities of life. On both counts, I am not suggesting that we should try to run an in-house facility. I am sure that both those facilities would prove attractive to somebody who may wish to come in and run them for us.

There is one somewhat exotic point I would make about the use of the new accommodation. Perhaps, if there has to be a chess room in the Palace of Westminster we could transfer it to the new accommodation. During the time I have been here I have yet to see the existing chess room in use. In making some inquiries about the chess ladder fixed to the wall, I saw a list of people who I suspect have not been Members of the House for a long time. I saw the name of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) listed and when I asked him about it this morning he expressed considerable surprise that his name should be on a chess ladder because he has never played chess in this place. If the chess room is moved to the new accommodation, it would free a room for something that is a matter of urgency. We should provide additional space so that hon. Members with spouses who wish to eat here on an ad hoc basis without being able to book can have a small amount of space used in much the same way as the Members' Dining Room. That would mean that if there was space one could obtain food and be with one's immediate family. Such accommodation is not available now unless one wants to go to the cafeteria and put one's food on a tray or book a table months in advance in one of the restaurants.

Similarly, in the new accommodation we must find space for exercise opportunities. My preferences, for what they are worth—I am sure that they will not be echoed by all hon. Members—are a swimming pool and squash courts. In case people outside feel that I am advocating the spending of public money on such things, I am sure that there would be private funds available to build a swimming pool and squash courts if the demand was there and they could charge for the use of them. It would not be a free facility but one that could be used within the confines of the Palace when we are kept here for long hours.

My suggestions arise out of paragraph 15 of the report which refers back to the previous report, which contained a much longer list of suggestions. As well as talking about a subway from the new buildings to here, as a user of Abbey gardens, may I put in a plea to minimise the risk of by-elections caused by hon. Members trying to get from Abbey gardens being mown down by traffic. It is fine when there is a Division because the police ensure that we can cross the road. However, on other occasions we take our lives in our hands. The traffic whizzes around and motorcyclists seem to be oblivious to the lanes of traffic.

I stress again that fax machines should be urgently provided and a modern paging system should be introduced. In the previous report the Speaker's Court figured strongly, but this time it seems to have been overlooked. Will the Minister guarantee that the use of that accommodation will be included in phase 2?

In the past few days I have found myself speaking to broadcasters in the rain. The thought has occurred to me that it might be possible to allow journalists to use Westminster Hall for filming and carrying out interviews. I cannot believe that that would either cause security problems or disrupt other activities because, for most of the day, apart from having tourists, Westminster Hall is not used for any purpose. This is a useful opportunity to improve the broadcasting facilities of this place, without spending any money.

I hope that this report is approved rapidly, and that that rapid approval leads to immediate action. I was delighted to hear my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House say earlier that he will provide time soon for the House to give its seal of approval to this report. When action is taken, hon. Members can look forward to being able to do their job properly, constituents can look forward to being treated properly and staff can look forward to having decent conditions in which to work. Family life might stand a chance here, and there will be fewer unhealthy Members of Parliament for our constituents to worry about. Rather than being apologetic for having a long list of conditions that I think should be improved, I think that all my suggestions, and others that have been made this morning, have to be good news for all who work here, for all whom we represent and for the nation at large. Above all else, if our working conditions are civilised, it has to be good news for democracy.

11.21 am

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), I am a new Member and I, too, was deeply shocked by what I found when I got here, despite having been told on numerous occasions how bad it would be. I thought that it must be exaggerated and that one could not run the nation's affairs in such a way. When I arrived here, like countless others, I found that I had no desk, no secretary, no typewriter and no telephone and that I had to make these arrangements ad hoc, in such corridors as I came across where telephones were free, and we were all competing. I found that I had to interview constituents in public, and it was to be many weeks before this state of affairs was put right.

When it was put right, I found myself in a room with three other Members of Parliament. By common consent, as our work load increased throughout the year, we agreed that we would also let our research assistants and any additional secretaries whom we thought that we ought to employ share that room. As a result, it is rare that we hear ourselves think, and we never hear ourselves speak. Never a day goes by without one of us being asked by the others in the room to talk more quietly on the telephone. The lines never seem to work properly anyway, and it is extremely difficult to hear.

One of my hon. Friends in that room, to make up the deficiency of secretarial provision, does some of her own typing. That clatter, combined with the noise of many conversations going on at once and much work in progress, makes it extremely difficult to do an efficient job. I daily find that I am not giving my constituents the sort of service that I would wish to give them, and although they are extremely tolerant, I am sure that they do not appreciate the almost impossible conditions in which we have to work.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne, I believe that one of the most essential things that we have to get right is the provision of space and facilities for our support staff, not just for ourselves. We can move to find telephones for private conversations if we have to, we can move to corridors for a bit more space, but we cannot reasonably expect our secretaries to cart their typewriters and heavy equipment around with them. It is essential that they have a stable, good and healthy working environment.

My secretary has to cope with sitting at one small desk with about 8 in of space behind her before she encroaches on to the space of another secretary. On that small desk, by the time that she has fitted in her word processor, her ever-overflowing in-tray and her telephone, there is hardly room for a biro, let alone a pile of work. That is not a satisfactory situation, yet little can be done about it because we are asking so many of our secretaries to put up with such conditions.

I have always thought that, instead of being allocated a desk, we should be allocated X amount of space for our support staff. We should be able to say that we will fill that space as we see fit. Some hon. Members may choose to fill it with electronic equipment, others may choose to fill it with old-fashioned filing cabinets and one desk with one secretary. Other Members, who either make their meagre allowances stretch or who subsidise them from their own salaries—it should be put on the record that many of us have to do that—may wish to employ more than one member of staff and fill that space with two desks. At the moment, that flexibility is not permitted us. We are allowed one desk, it is laid down where we shall have it, often a long way from our offices, and that is where our secretaries are supposed to work.

I think that I heard that in the new building we are to be allowed 50 sq ft of space. The ideal by 1995 is that we should each have our own room and should be allowed, in addition, 50 sq ft for our clerical and secretarial staff. I have not done a square root since I did O-level maths, but I make that an area of approximately 7 ft by 7 ft. If that is the ideal standard towards which we are working, it will not be enough. One would be hard put to squash two desks into that space, or more than the two regulation filing cabinets. It should be added that we have to buy our own filing cabinets if we want more than the two regulation ones. That is not enough space, and if that is our ideal, we cannot be working towards a modern and efficient Parliament and a modern and efficient service for our constituents.

I am a full-time Member of Parliament. I do nothing outside the House, and I try to devote my working day to coping with an extremely large volume of correspondence from constituents in distress, and from constituents with strong views. Apart from the urgent cases, there is nearly always a delay in answering routine stuff, simply because there are not the facilities to do it as quickly and efficiently as I would have wished.

If we are seriously aiming at a secretarial work space of 7 ft by 7 ft, then we are aiming at future inefficiency, inadequacy and a complete mess as, more and more, we become full-time Members but do not have access to office space outside the House and, in general, have to make up facilities in the best way that we can. I would appreciate it if my hon. Friend the Minister would comment on that figure of 50 sq ft, which I think I heard correctly, and tell me what he thinks can be fitted into that miserable area that will help to service Members of Parliament adequately.

I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne said about the need for the facility of a small shop where we can buy necessities. I am sure that my cat would uphold that. I have often tried to buy a tin of cat food, but not being able to get out during the day, and leaving this place at 3 am when all the fish and chip shops are closed, I cannot even buy him a bit of fish. In general, it would be helpful if we had somewhere that we could purchase necessities.

I have another plea. Can we have a uniform database? Can Members of Parliament be told about systems that are consistent with that database, so that we could find for ourselves much of the information that we now ask the Library staff and our research assistants to provide? One of my major problems is that most of my research information comes to me at best second-hand and often third-hand, and I should like to be able to key in and do certain essential research myself. I could do that if we had a proper working system database.

Finally, may I put in a plea, not only for somewhere to buy a toothbrush, a pair of tights or cat food, but for some

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

equality? There is an ever-growing number of ladies in this House and I hope that that number will continue to grow. Why, then, can we not have a unisex barber and hairdresser?

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): You are welcome to him.

Miss Widdecombe: Why can we not have such facilities? Why is it that, when a lady and a gentleman are asked to appear on television, the man always looks extremely smart and neat?

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The men very rarely do.

Mr. Holt: Speak for yourself.

Miss Widdecombe: At least they have the opportunity to do so, whereas the lady, who has gone out in the rain to get to the television studios, arrives looking bedraggled and has no facilities where she can put that right.

I may make that point slightly frivolously, but I do not make frivolously the point about secretarial space: 7 ft by 7 ft is not enough. It is not ideal, and we should not accept it as the standard.

11.31 am

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), I am also one of the new Members of Parliament. I am not deeply shocked about the facilities here, but I wonder about the way in which we allocate those facilities.

Much of today's discussion is about the acute need for accommodation for Members of Parliament. When something is provided free at the point of consumption, as our office space is allocated, it does not surprise me that there is a considerable demand, not just from the point of view of Members, but from their staff. There was a time when Members' secretaries were generally accommodated outside this building, but when we start providing office space cheaply, or free, and telephones, it is inevitable that the demand for space within the building, or close to it, will build up. Anything that is free at the point of consumption generates an excessive demand.

I should like the Minister to tell us the average cost of providing accommodation for Members and their secretaries and whether we might consider being allowed to spend that sum of money on accommodation and facilities outside this building. A number of hon. Members would prefer to have office space in other parts of the town, but, because of the temptation of "free" space, we all want to congregate around here. We might not need as much accommodation as we think we need, if we appreciated the cost of that accommodation, if that cost were negotiable and if we could have that money to spend elsewhere on accommodation. That could take the pressure off the apparently insatiable demand for accommodation here.

Part of our problem is that we cannot make up our minds what we are in this place. On the one hand, we are treated like self-employed people, providing our own equipment, such as filing cabinets. On the other hand, we behave as if we were employees of Her Majesty's Government. We now receive our salary on that basis, although that was not so some years ago, when Members were treated as being self-employed from the point of view of salary. The Members at the time did a switch because it enhanced their pension prospects.

We are now neither one thing nor the other. We are not full employees, in which case we might have expected accommodation and facilities to be laid on, yet we are no longer self-employed. Although this matter is outside the scope of the debate, it would be a good idea to sort that out. We would not then be constantly whingeing about whether the Government should provide us with fax machines or bleepers, as if we were hospital doctors doing a ward round.

I am concerned that phase 2 has been given over to the Property Services Agency for its control and decision. That organisation has proved to be far from sensitive in matters of architecture. I think of the hideous structure in Marsham street, the Department of the Environment, and of the new Queen Elizabeth II conference centre, which is also far from delightful, with green fencing boards all around it. It adds nothing to the charm of Parliament square, yet that was also built under the control of the PSA.

Rather than limiting our scope to one set of architects, who are currently nominated by the PSA—the Casson Conder consortium—we should bring in outside architects to give us some ideas on how we might make the best use of the site. When we limit those decisions, we end up with scandals such as the one reported in last night's *Evening Standard*, under the heading "£50m web of bribery exposed," which said that PSA officers have been involved in allocating contracts to builders because of the limited scope of the way in which they tender for work. I put in a strong plea for the PSA not to have the main control over this development, both in the interests of a more imaginative scheme and in an attempt to reduce the opportunities for corruption.

When I was a Westminster city councillor, the council carried out some developments and was asked to put up certain sums of money for roofs. I have told this story before, but it is worth telling again. Our local officers, in co-operation with the accredited list of contractors, had accepted a price for those roofs of £140,000 each. This took place in my ward, so I took a great interest in it. In the end, the real cost of that work was about half that price, so we made a considerable saving of about a quarter of a million pounds. When such large sums of money are involved, we should get a wide range of estimates. The architects and quantity surveyors involved in the project should be brought in from outside the close, incestuous network normally used by the PSA.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am not sure whether Westminster council is a happy choice for examples of cost-cutting efficiency. After all, it sold its graveyards for 5p and is now trying to purchase them back compulsorily at a cost of £5·5 million. I do not think Westminster council can teach us about cost efficiency. Surely the hon. Lady must realise that the PSA scheme is cheaper than other schemes. Surely she wants a cheaper scheme rather than a more expensive scheme.

Mrs. Gorman: There appear to be two options for this scheme. The first is the Casson Conder scheme and the other is the PSA scheme, so we are limiting ourselves unnecessarily to those two options.

As for Westminster council, I take the hon. Gentleman's point to some extent—that, in considering such matters, bureaucracies often make awful mistakes. In the case of Westminster, the officers concerned have yet to resign. The councillor concerned has done the honourable thing and accepted responsibility.

Mr. Banks: What about the leader?

Mrs. Gorman: I support my colleagues who are calling for an outside agency to handle the catering and the facilities which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone mentioned, are so essential for people who are tied up here all day. A little general store should be laid on. I note that there will be shops in the front of the new building and it is reasonable for whoever leases those shops—it is likely to be the Government, through the PSA —to dictate what those shops shall offer by way of services.

About 4,500 people work in or are associated with this building. During the day, people want to tidy themselves up for an evening meeting or a bit of shopping. It is disgraceful that we do not allow the private sector to provide us with the necessary facilities. I am not sure about the plea for recreation and exercise facilities. There is an enormous shooting gallery underneath the House of Lords. I do not know how many hunting, shooting and fishing people use that facility. I question the propriety of us extending that and calling for our own squash and swimming facilities.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) commented on the facilities in the ICI building and the squash courts there which are available for our use. When I was a Westminster city councillor, I remember that entire building being on offer for £5 million. We could then have taken over that superb ICI Millbank building—with its sports facilities—and it could have been used as accommodation for people working in Parliament. I remember writing to my Member of Parliament, who is still the hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), suggesting that he refer that building to the PSA, but I got nowhere. The PSA is a little empire which, naturally enough, enjoys its own powers and ability to control a budget of about £2·5 billion, which is an awful lot of money. I am glad to see that the Secretary of State for the Environment is calling for a great deal more of accountability and openness from that organisation.

In calling for more facilities for ourselves, we should consider the costs. I certainly would like to know what it costs per capita to provide our facilities. Do we need to provide them all in-house? Is there a case for Members having a budget and buying the accommodation that they wish—whether a small single office or a share in an office —and thereby creating a market for office facilities for Members? We would not then be restricted to using this area because what is on offer appears, at least at first sight, to be free.

There is, also, the question of the delay involved. There is the slippage, as it is euphemistically known, of the Cannon row site. If the private sector had been doing that work for us, I would hope that we would have had strong penalty clauses which would make the concept of slippage alien. Slippage would result in the company losing profitability, which is a wonderful spur to get the job done on time. I believe that if the private sector had been carrying out such a development, it would have completed it, in, perhaps, six months or a year at the very most. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind when he considers who will get the work.

When I was a member of Westminster city council, there was an office block, accommodating 500 to 600 people, on the corner of Perkins rents—which is just beyond one of our Government buildings—that we delayed and delayed, mostly for silly political reasons. When we finally allowed it to go ahead, within six months it was occupied.

Delays are inevitably caused by a bureaucratic set-up like the PSA and the lack at present of open competition for the very design and facilities. We need to consider whether we need to keep adding facilities here, as opposed to giving Members the financial options of choosing where they work, which may not be in the confines of this building. I am one of those people who often feel completely claustrophobic when here in the evenings—I cannot wait to get out. A little office nearby that was not part of this building would certainly appeal to me. The shared office in Norman Shaw North, for which I do not pay rent, has a certain attraction. However, if I were able to use that financial allocation more flexibly, I may decide not to be actually attached to this building.

Again, I was a Westminster city councillor in the days of the T. Dan Smith scandals concerning the construction of large municipal developments in the north of England. The Redcliffe Maude report about that pointed out the dangers of the rather incestuous working relationship between local government departments and the councillors, with their ability to grant favours to friends and close associates. We should bear that in mind when we are considering how to allocate the development of the site opposite.

Nobody would deny that that site needs redevelopment. It is hideous; it has been a disgrace and a scar on this historic area for far too long. There are those dirty, scruffy little shops with all their bits stuck out on the pavement and the ghastly, filthy Bridge street building. I do not know why the broadcasting authorities are allowed to occupy so much of that building. Do they pay us rent? Is it properly costed? I do not know why we should worry about providing facilities for them. Why do they not find their own facilities in or around the building?

I believe that we spend too much time—in the way that councils do—in deciding nit-picking details which are not the proper duty of parliamentarians. It reminds me of my time on Westminster city council, when we spent hours and hours deciding what colour to paint the council house doors. In a way, this exercise is similar. A private company would bring in outside experts to give them advice, and tell them to get on with it. It could be given a brief of the facilities required—such as the shops and the means by which we cross the road—and they would get on with it. Anything designed by a committee—I am sure that that includes the Services Committee—is more likely to turn out like a camel than a horse.

11.45 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I apologise to the House for coming late into the debate, but I have been in my constituency. I should like to make a few observations on the report and, having listened to previous contributions, perhaps make some points of my own about

[Mr. Tony Banks]

the way in which hon. Members are treated in this place, especially Back-Bench Members. Of course, it is primarily Back-Bench Members who are taking the opportunity of having their views heard this morning. Frankly, I do not believe that this is the best way of finding out the views of Members generally. Friday debates often tend to be characterised by vast acres of empty green Benches and this place takes on the appearance of the legislative equivalent of the Marie Celeste. It would have perhaps been better if we had had a debate which involved more hon. Members. We should, perhaps, have extended the debate on Thursday when we were discussing procedures generally. Having said that, one should not complain that one has the opportunity to stand up and put a few points to the Minister, which will, perhaps, be taken into account.

I welcome the new facilities with which we shall be provided. Who would not? It would be a surly and fairly ridiculous Member of Parliament who was completely content with our present facilities. So many complaints are voiced by Members one to another and one clearly realises that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction with our working conditions.

Unfortunately, perhaps, Members of Parliament are not the most popular group in our society. I do not quite know why that is, but it is a fact. There will be some people outside who, if they were to listen to the debate or if it were to be reported, would say, "They are just a bunch of whingers. There they are, going on again about themselves and their resources." I must join with Conservative Members and make it quite clear that this is not just a good occasion to whinge. We are whingeing—if indeed we are—because many of us consider that we are prevented from doing the sort of job that we want to do on behalf of our constituents. That is what it is all about. We do not ask for enhanced facilities in this place because we want to luxuriate in them but because we want to do a better job for our constituents.

I take the points that were made by Conservative Members. Some of the office facilities for hon. Members are so appalling that we would not tolerate them outside this place, and many of us would demand that something be done. As Members of Parliament, it is always easier to demand that something be done for other people than it is to say that something should be done for ourselves. Quite frankly, if we are not capable of delivering decent facilities for ourselves to do a better job, perhaps we are not in a good position to demand them on behalf of other people.

In welcoming the new facilities, I emphasise that the debate is not about our wanting better conditions for ourselves, to wine and dine and thoroughly enjoy ourselves, it is about us being able to do a better job for our constituents.

In a debate some years ago, I referred to the Palace of Westminster as a legislative slum, because, behind Barry and Pugin's neo-gothic splendour of the Palace of Westminster, some appalling conditions exist, and Members' staff and the workers in this place must endure them. For example, one has only to see the conditions downstairs in the basement for those who work in the various restaurants and snack bars to realise just how unacceptable such conditions are for any group of workers. Several improvements have been made, but, quite frankly, because of the antiquated nature of the building, it is almost impossible to raise the standards of the work place to the necessary levels that we would want. From the plans, I note that we shall ensure that those who provide the valuable support services that Members of Parliament need will be given adequate, bearable and good working conditions in the new building.

I referred to this place as a legislative slum. When we give guided tours, many of our visitors are quite surprised at the bare facilities in the Chamber. There is nothing on which to rest papers, and there is no way in which to have an allocated position. There are many touching little customs and traditions in this place. There cannot be one Member of Parliament, wherever he or she stands on the political spectrum, who has not pointed out, sometimes with pride and sometimes with total disbelief, the two red sword lines along the Floor of the Chamber. We point out these things, and we find such traditions amusing, supportive of the system, or whatever else, depending on our political views. But that is not what it is all about. It is about this place being a workplace for us to do a proper job. Quite frankly, we do not have the facilities in this place to do a proper and effective job.

My first place for working here was down in the cloisters. "Cloisters" is a rather fancy word for "corridor". Because we are not subject to Acts of Parliament such as the shops and factories legislation and the various fire regulations, which we insist that others should adhere to, we endure terrible facilities downstairs in the cloisters. If there ever were a fire in the cloisters, we would not face the odd by-election, we would face a mini-general election. If fire officers were rigorously to apply fire safety regulations, they would close the cloisters and, probably, other large sections of the Palace of Westminster.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) mentioned Westminster Hall and asked why we cannot make greater use of it. On many occasions when we have discussed facilities generally, I have asked the Lord President of the Council why we cannot use Westminster Hall more effectively and extensively. It is a wonderful space. Architecturally, it is a glorious space. It is the oldest part of the Palace, and it is an architectural wonder, but, at the same time, it is a terrible waste of space. Westminster Hall was where it all began. Westminster Hall used to be the nerve centre of the Palace of Westminster. It is a great shame that it is badly under-used at the moment. Because of problems elsewhere, some exhibitions are going on downstairs, tucked away in the corner. Amnesty International has an excellent exhibition there at the moment. I hope that all hon. Members will have a chance to visit it. That is only a temporary use of the Hall and we should consider its far more permanent use as an exhibition space. I have said that we ought to put on concerts there or allow dance groups to use it for rehearsals.

When I was chair of the arts committee of the GLC the greatest scandal in the arts in London generally was not just the inadequate funding level but the lack of space in which to exhibit works of art by our young artists and sculptors and space for dance groups and emerging musicians to use. Some Conservative Members—not necessarily Conservative Members who are here for this debate—have said that that is not a fitting and proper use for Westminster Hall.

The previous Leader of the House said that one of Westminster Hall's greatest attractions was that it was so large and empty. That is an elitist point of view and is not acceptable, given the great lack of space in the capital city for the arts functions for which I would like to see Westminster Hall used. Anyone who has read Pepys's diaries will know that Westminster Hall was a thriving centre of activity and that all sorts of things went on there in earlier centuries. We should try to restore some of the vibrant life that used to exist there and get it back there in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Another point that I would like to make while I have this somewhat unexpected opportunity to speak in the House is that I entirely support Conservative Members who talk about the inadequate resources that they are given for secretarial and research facilities. I am not whingeing but I find that hon. Members who tend to complain about inadequate resources are usually those who are doing the hardest work. That tends to unite the House. Many hardworking hon. Members in all parts of the House rightfully complain about the inadequate funds for research and secretarial assistance.

One does not want vast retinues of secretaries and researchers, but one wants an adequate level. It is anachronistic that, in terms of research and secretarial resources, all hon. Members are treated in exactly the same way whatever the work load. I come from a very deprived area of London, but I know that some Conservative Members have similar problems in their constituencies. We have enormous problems. In a place such as Newham I am almost loth to encourage people to come to me. So many people find their way there anyway that I do not have to encourage them, but I should like to be able to do far more to get people to come to me, write to me or visit me in my constituency office. I find it necessary to keep a full-time office in my constituency because that is where my problems are. I am loth to go out of my way to encourage people because I do not have the resources and facilities to deal with the additional problems that would surface.

I feel some resentment from time to time because I know that I am being given exactly the same resources as a Conservative Member in a leafy rural constituency whose only weekly problem is perhaps to decide what fete or sale of works of art to open at the weekend. I have to deal with problems that come in by the sackload. It is silly to think that all Members have an equal work load when we know that that is not the case. I do not quite know how one would go about it, but somehow the facilities and the resources that Members are given should in some way be linked to the work load that they have to bear. That seems perfectly reasonable. We would consider it totally reasonable outside the House. Why do we not accept in the House so many of the things that are considered reasonable and which we impose on or suggest for people outside? It is nonsensical that we should treat ourselves differently, especially when that operates to our disadvantage in terms of the resources we can provide for ourselves to enable us to carry out our job. The best way to make Members one of the better liked groups in our society rather than one of the least liked is to ensure that we are seen to be doing more of a job more efficiently on behalf of our constituents.

There is another issue that I wish to raise on the role of Members of this place, if only for the reason that I was unsuccessful in catching the eye of the occupant of the Chair during a recent procedure debate. The House is a place that penalises the hard worker in two ways, one of which I have referred to already. It penalises the hard worker in the Chamber in our proceedings. It is fairly easy to catch Mr. Speaker's eye on a Friday morning when everyone else has cleared off. That is all right for those of us who are prepared to attend on a Friday, but it is not merely a matter of making speeches. The idea is to make a contribution that has some influence and will have some effect on the deliberations of the House.

I find it frustrating when I want to speak in a debate —I hasten to say that I am not whingeing, because I am called fairly regularly—and I am told by your good self, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or by Mr. Speaker, that there is a long list of hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate and that I have already spoken on several occasions in other debates. I know that Mr. Speaker keeps a fairly close tally of the number of times that Members speak. Then I am told that Mr. So and So or Ms. So and So has not spoken so far in the Session—it may be that we are nearly at the end of it—and that preference must be given to him or her. It is a funny old workplace where the person who turns up regularly is told, "I am sorry but you will be penalised for attending regularly", whereas the person who turns up intermittently has the fatted calf killed for him. It would be a strange workplace where the regular worker who turned up to clock on was told that there was something wrong with him, while a colleague who had not turned up for weeks was given free bacon sandwiches by the gaffer. I find that a strange way of treating hon. Members.

Those who do not turn up regularly in this place should not be rewarded by being able easily to catch Mr. Speaker's eye. Surely they should be penalised. Someone should say to them—perhaps the Whips—"If you don't turn up here more often, don't expect to get in on debates very easily. You will have to give way to those who have spoken on more occasions than you because they are doing a more regular job, if not a better one. We reward regular attendance."

Mrs. Gorman: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that he is retelling the tale of the Prodigal Son? He is complaining that he is undervalued, although he is always doing his bit, when the black sheep who comes back occasionally is rewarded. There is more joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents—it is something like that—than over all those who slog away at the workplace all the time. That is life.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Lady has mixed up a number of biblical analogies. I have always felt sorry for the brother of the Prodigal Son. We have one or two prodigal sons and one or two prodigal daughters in this place, and I would not alter any of my remarks about the way in which they are treated. If they cannot be bothered to come here, or if they can find other things to do, they should not expect preferential treatment when they do attend. Unfortunately, they do enjoy preferential treatment.

In addition—I must throw this in—there is the nonsensical notion that Privy Councillors should be given precedence during a debate. That has not been the practice during this debate but it applied during the recent procedure debate to which I have referred. We see phoenixes rising from the ashes of their political careers to give us the benefit of their experience. They then disappear until they choose in a few weeks' time to participate in another big debate. I find that unacceptable.

Mr. Wilshire: I hope that I do not seem phoenix-like in asking the hon. Gentleman to reflect, before his

[Mr. Wilshire]

enthusiasm for giving priority to those who attend regularly runs away with him. The logical extension of his argument that those who are here more often should be called to speak more often is that those who say more should be rewarded more. I sincerely hope that he is not advocating that those who speak most should receive further preference.

Mr. Banks: Of course I did not mean that. If hon. Members were paid by the word, I suspect that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) would be a millionaire by now. There are many hon. Members who manage to say very little in a great deal of time. I do not want to fall foul of that myself. I welcome the new proposals and I hope that the arguments and discussions about who will carry them out and how fast that can be done will be cleared away quickly and that we can go into the new facilities and be better able to do our jobs as Members of Parliament—of whatever party—who are trying to represent our constituencies.

The Property Services Agency and the Minister have lost an excellent opportunity by not considering the use of county hall, on the other side of the river, to provide facilities for Members of Parliament. I know that the Government want to turn county hall into a hotel. A previous Secretary of State for the Environment said that he would like county hall to be taken down brick by brick because it represented something odious to the Government. We all remember the battles that were fought in the Chamber—which will continue to be fought —over the Government's abolition of the Greater London council. Since city-wide Government has not yet been restored to the capital—which the next Labour Government will do, or perhaps even a future Conservative Government, when the present Prime Minister has retired to Dulwich or wherever else she has managed to get a free house—county hall could be used for public offices. In the meantime, it stands empty, waiting for its future inappropriate use as a hotel—which will involve great difficulties. The Government could decide to use the facilities at county hall for Members of Parliament. If Members of Parliament were able to use the excellent facilities there, that would satisfy many of the points that I have raised about the lack of resources and facilities here. When the Minister makes his winding-up speech, I hope that he will tell us whether consideration has been, or will be, given to the use of county hall as offices for Members of Parliament or as public offices for others in this area of London. I know that he is involved in discussions on the future use of county hall.

12.8 pm

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): I apologise for not having been here at the commencement of the debate. I did not think that I would be called to speak on this subject at all, but I wanted to throw in my pennyworth. I enjoyed hearing the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)—as I always do. He and I are two of the most assiduous hon. Members and we could name the dozen or so hon. Members who attend regularly. I sympathise with many of his remarks. However, it is far worse to be a Government Back Bencher than an Opposition Back Bencher in that an Opposition Back Bencher has much more freedom to speak than we do. We are restricted to four speeches a year, except on a Friday. If one represents a north-eastern constituency, as I do, one is in the north-east most weekends so one is rarely here on a Friday. Our opportunity to speak is therefore restricted. That is not about what we are supposed to be debating today—which is accommodation.

I wonder how many hon. Members have considered the matter in relation to the changing role of Members of Parliament—which is important. Members of Parliament today are very different from those of 20, 50 or 100 years ago because most of them are full-time working Members of Parliament who do not have outside activities and who are constrained to working here.

Unlike most places outside, we debate our salaries, conditions and working environment. I wonder why we were pitched at the third tier of a civil servant's salary? Perhaps they wanted to ensure that we were not pitched at a higher level for office accommodation and back-up facilities. Civil servants would not work in these conditions. Sir Humphrey would find a way of buying the Dorchester and putting his staff in there.

I should tell my new hon. Friends that I entered the House of Commons at the age of 52—a geriatric by modern standards. Before then I worked as a personnel manager in industry. I spent 25 years interviewing people and trying to put them into the right jobs. They had to decide whether to accept the terms and conditions of employment. If some of the senior people whom I have engaged were expected to work in the conditions in which Members of Parliament must work, British industry would have lost many of them. They would not tolerate working in such conditions. For one thing, it is impossible to think properly when one has to share an office with three other people, the telephone is ringing constantly and there are many other interruptions.

Some people say that we can do our thinking in the Library, but it is pretty well occupied end to end. A casual visitor to the Library who simply wants to write a letter has great difficulty finding a desk that is not already occupied. It is hard to find somewhere in the building where one can sit down quietly and read an important report so that one can take it in.

When I first entered Parliament I had an office in Norman Shaw building. For a short time—it was only two days before I took action—I had to share an office with my hon. Friend the present Under-Secretary of State for Health. I assure hon. Members that that was no joy. I now enjoy shared facilities with a very compatible friend.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): In which Department is this new friend of the hon. Gentleman's?

We have an excellent Library with a first-class staff, but it must be the only Library in the United Kingdom that allows its patrons to smoke.

Mr. Holt: I smoke a cigar occasionally, so I shall not go down that path. The hon. Gentleman believes that our Library is good, but he should visit the library of the American Congress to see how it works. Its facilities are mind-boggling, To understand the difference is like trying to understand walking on the moon.

Mr. Wilshire: I, too, have visited the library of Congress. I wonder whether my hon. Friend had the opportunity to ask the United States service to provide information on a subject, in the way that we ask our

Library to provide information? I was able to compare the information provided here, with our rudimentary facilities, with that provided through the magnificent facilities of Congress. It is a tribute to our staff that the information that I obtained here was almost as good as the information that I obtained there.

Mr. Holt: That is a compliment to the staff, not to the facilities. Our facilities are inadequate and I would argue that with anyone. Too many people are trying to use too small a facility. As our jobs grow and we perform more and more full-time work as Members of Parliament and require back-up facilities, we need research assistants to help us. I defy anyone to know everything about everything all the time.

Recently, I got into trouble because I did not know at the drop of a hat what a Macmillan nurse was. I am sorry, that information had not registered with me. There are all sorts of things that we would like to know about the nurses' dispute. We need research assistants to examine those matters for us. I have been here for only five and a half years. I must wait another 14½ years before my research assistant will be allowed to use the Library. I do not even have a desk for my secretary and I have been here five and a half years. My secretary must use my desk, which I can use only after 7 pm when she has gone home if I want to write personal correspondence to my constituents.

I am used to industry and commerce, but I could not work in an environment if my office was in one building and my secretary was elsewhere, for instance in Norman Shaw. It is very stupid to ask Members of Parliament to work in such conditions.

Although I have not read the report properly, it seems that we will continue to have pigeon holes. The system will be no better for our successors. I remember the arguments from the former right hon. Member for South Down, Mr. Enoch Powell. He did not want a secretary, an office or a desk. He believed that we should all be in the Chamber participating in debates, creating legislation and orating. That is how it used to be; it is not how it is now. We must rationalise and work in modern circumstances.

I have a small personal point to make with reference to a comment made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West. I need to have a drink when I speak because I am a diabetic. I have special permission from Mr. Speaker to bring a drink into the Chamber and I can poke it under here and have a drink if I want one. However, I should not have a drink in the Chamber.

Mr. Tony Banks: I thought that I would give the hon. Gentleman a chance to have a sip of his water. I did not realise that one needed Mr. Speaker's permission to bring a drink into the Chamber. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is correct in that. I assure him that secreted away under here I have a small hip flask and I once brought a carton of orange juice into the Chamber. I tucked it away down here and looked down from my papers and had a quick suck—of the the orange juice of course.

Mr. Holt: I am grateful for that moment's break. I do not want to enter into a huge argument with the hon. Gentleman, but I believe that we are not allowed to eat or drink in the Chamber. I remember walking into the Chamber one day with a drink and I was stopped by the gentleman outside whose job it is to ensure that the rules are maintained. As a consequence I asked for permission, although I will not pursue whether I needed to do that. My point is that we do not have the facilities for a drink. The Front-Bench speakers may get dry mouths and can have a drink. The Back Benchers cannot. Water is provided, but that is not cooled and probably has stood for three days. Nevertheless, there is water for the Front Benches.

The office conditions for our staff are even worse than ours. The conditions would not be acceptable to the inspectorates in industry and commerce let alone to the would-be employee. However, our secretaries must work in the most appalling conditions. Before I became a Member of this House I had a secretary working for me in industry and commerce. She thought that it would be marvellous to come and work with me here after I was elected as a Member of Parliament. Alas, she is no longer with me. She could not tolerate the working conditions. She put up with them for four years in the hope that some day they would be better, but she did not see the day coming before her retirement and she is only a young lady. She chose to work for a major institution in the City, where the conditions she now enjoys are similar to those she had when she worked for me in industry and commerce. I am sure that these conditions stop many potentially high-flying people from working for us as secretaries. We need good secretaries. Any Member of Parliament without a secretary, except for Mr. Enoch Powell, who says that he can cope without a secretary to assist him with his diary and all our other tasks, is not doing the job properly.

With our allowance we can buy either a new typewriter, which our secretary requires because—with the number of letters that she has bashed out, she has worn out last year's model—or we can buy something electronic, such as a computer or fax machine——

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): And be taxed on it.

Mr. Holt: Yes, indeed—or have a research assistant. We can pay peanuts invariably to some aspiring young politician to work himself silly in the hope that one day he may have these inadequate facilities as a Member of Parliament. We should have better facilities for research assistants. I do not have one, but if I did I would have to ask him or her to share the shoe box upstairs with my colleague, my secretary and myself. There is nowhere for research assistants to go all day, every day to work, unless they work for a Member who has been here for a long time, and are consequently given a special pass.

While we are involved in a bit of a bitching session, perhaps I may put in a word about the lifts. I hesitate to mention this, but they are so jinxed and so often out of order. Two days ago I was in a lift with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) and his guide dog and we pressed for the first and second floors. It did not stop at the first floor—it has a mind of its own and is never adequately repaired—but went straight to the second floor where I was getting out. The hon. Gentleman was in a difficult position because we did not want to risk him being caught in the lift, so I moved him into the next door lift which has double sliding doors which are not easy for a sighted Member, let alone a non-sighted Member. Why do we have such inadequate lifts after all these years? Has somebody only recently invented the lift or is it considered

[Mr. Holt]

that it is all right for us to walk up and down three flights of stairs every time we come in and out of the building? We must have this looked into seriously.

Throughout the long summer recess the lift was out of action for maintenance. Perhaps the Property Services Agency was working on it. I do not know. But as a member of the Select Committee on the Environment I have examined the workings of the PSA, particularly in relation to the new gaol building programme, and I know that nothing coming from the PSA will surprise me. It is amazing that estimates for building prisons can be 85 per cent. below the final cost. That led to repairs and rectification work. The original distance between the upright bars on stairs was found not to be correct; if people had walked up and down the stairs they could have slipped through them. Additional bars have had to be inserted, at enormous cost to the ratepayer. It has put back the programme and has led to prison overcrowding and all the other problems that we could do without. The thought of the PSA's inadequate prison building programme makes me shudder when I think that it may be given the responsibility to provide our facilities. Two things could happen. First, the facilities that the PSA provides will not be right. Secondly, they will cost twice as much.

I do not want Parliament to become a place where Members can do their weekend shopping. I sympathise with my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) and her cats, but this is a legislative building. If one visits legislative buildings in other parts of the world, one finds that they have marvellous facilities for all sorts of things, but I have not yet observed that they sell cat meat. That would be a retrograde step.

Miss Widdecombe: My point about cats was partially, but not wholly, frivolous. Those of us who are both full-time Members of Parliament and single and who work in this place from 9 o'clock in the morning right through until 3 o'clock the next morning occasionally need to buy a few unusual goods, largely because we have been too busy to do our normal shopping. Is it unreasonable to ask that personal necessities should be sold in one small area when posh Parker pens and souvenirs are already being sold in another area?

Mr. Holt: I have to disagree with my hon. Friend. We are responsible for so organising our lives that we have time to do our shopping. For instance, I had to go to hospital this week——

Mrs. Gorman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Holt: No, I do not intend to give way. I am still answering the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone. I had to spend three or four hours at that hospital. I could not say, "Look, I am such a busy, important person that I have to be in the House of Commons from 9 o'clock in the morning until 3 o'clock the next morning. Therefore you will have to open the hospital on a Sunday so that I can have my X-ray then." It does not work like that. We have to achieve a balance. We do not do the same thing all day, every day. If we intend to make a speech on a particular subject, we probably spend two or three days on research; we think about and work in advance on what we intend to say. We know that we shall be unable to go shopping. But that does not happen all the time, and we make arrangements to go shopping within normal constraints.

I do not believe that this building is the right place to go shopping. Where would it end? There would be a greengrocer's shop here, and every other kind of shop. That would be completely wrong.

I do not accept that hon. Members have no leisure time. I am a full-time Member of Parliament, but I have plenty of leisure time. I am going to the theatre tonight. If I so wanted, I could do my shopping tonight. That does not make me a bad Member of Parliament. It makes me a balanced Member of Parliament. An unbalanced Member of Parliament is one who spends his or her time from 9 o'clock in the morning until 3 o'clock the next morning working and working and never having a change.

Mrs. Gorman: Is not my hon. Friend a married man? My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) made a valid point about women Members of Parliament. We are responsible for remembering that the toothpaste has run out. I am sure that many of our male colleagues have wives to do the shopping for them. The whole point about shops, though, is that it is expected that shops will be provided at the bottom of the new building. The question is what those shops should provide. My proposal was that when leases are allocated a variety of facilities should be borne in mind. They should include a general store, a chemist's shop and other facilities that women Members of Parliament in particular would like and would find most useful.

Mr. Holt: I take my hon. Friend's point, but I hope that she takes it to heart, as queen of the market forces, that if market forces dictate that every one of the shops sells cheap junky souvenirs, that is what will happen. She cannot have her cake and eat it. She cannot suggest a planned economy, saying what should be in the shops, and then say that she believes in market forces for office rents. I do not accept that duplicity.

We are here today to express our personal views about our accommodation. I do not believe that we want to get involved with shops. I believe that we want better facilities for ourselves and for our secretaries, research assistants and other staff. We cannot concern ourselves about whether a person is married, single, male or female. In this non-sexist age, we must concern ourselves with Members of Parliament.

Mr. Tony Banks: I must say that I enjoyed the hon. Gentleman's put-down of his hon. Friend, although I have some sympathy with the point that she raised. However, as was said earlier, shops are not meant to cater only for the needs of Members of Parliament but for the thousands of people who will work in the new facilities. Quite frankly, if we are talking about market forces, Mr. Enoch Powell always detested the souvenir stand downstairs, but it actually makes quite a lot of money. Therefore, it would be possible to square the circle and solve the problems that exist on the Conservative Benches. If there were adequate facilities within this building or the new building for people to buy groceries and other things, those facilities would also make money and Conservative Members would be satisfied and would not be falling out with each other.

Mr. Holt: I hope that we are not falling out with each other.

I do not have a public school background, therefore I did not have the pseudo-advantages of learning of some of the things that go with a public school background, but I know that this establishment is run as an extension of a public school. We have our juniors, our seniors, the prefects and the remove. We have some quaint and ancient traditions and I would not wish too many of them to be done away with. But I wonder why, in this modern day and age, we have the anachronism referred to by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West of catching Mr. Speaker's eye and why we have to stand up and sit down like recalcitrant school children in order to do so. Why do we not have the facility of putting our hands up?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We debated procedure on Wednesday evening. We are now talking not about parliamentary procedure but about the new building.

Mr. Tony Banks: Fortunately, I got away with it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That just goes to show that I ought to have been in the Chair earlier.

Mr. Holt: It just shows my luck as usual. Perhaps while we are talking not about what happens here but only about what happens in the new facilities, I can ask whether we are to contemplate installing the facility of listening to the debate taking place in the Chamber? Are we to have closed-circuit television to enable us to do so? Why do we not consider the electronic advantages that would flow from the new building into this building so that we would not have to stand up and sit down like recalcitrant school children, but prearrange with Mr. Speaker that we would be speaking between 7 pm and 9 pm, instead of having to do what we do now and sit here from 3.30 pm until perhaps 8 pm or 9 pm waiting for a six or seven minute slice of time? That is totally wrong. It is part and parcel of the frustration. If we had decent offices with decent facilities and modern communication, we would all be much happier.

We know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have not heard the debate up to now, and that is not your fault, but almost everyone who has spoken has spoken in a bitching manner. No one has been enthusiastic about the situation as it is or as it will be.

I hope that when my hon. Friend the Minister winds up the debate he will not talk of next week or next year. I hope that he will realise that Westmister Hall has been around a long time and that, whatever decision we ultimately take, it will be around for a long time.

12.35 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On behalf of the Opposition I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and the Committee on their work. I am glad that the Leader of the House has been able to rejoin us because I may want to call on him. I am waiting for further information. We welcomed his initial contribution to the debate. I also echo the tribute paid to the late John Silkin for the work he did while Chairman. There are few people who could be more suitably described as "House of Commons men" than John.

This morning we have inevitably had to talk about our own experiences and some of the discussion may, from the outside, seem somewhat trivial. However, we are talking of working conditions not just for ourselves but many others. About 4,000 people other than Members of Parliament work here. Therefore, when we describe the conditions that affect us, we are describing the better end of the conditions because those who work for us, often including the civil servants working within the building, have even fewer adequate facilities. However, that should not blur the fact that we are dealing with a historic and highly prestigious site and what we put on that site will be part of our heritage.

We are here to consider and approve—I am sure that we shall do so—something much more modest than that because we are asked only to endorse some calls for action and no one is suggesting that we should not. The suggestions are that we should carry out preliminary design work, undertake a study and carry out a feasibility report. No one finds that exceptionable and we would probably all endorse the comment of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore who was astonished to discover that, although he understood that the work was to go ahead on an anticipatory basis five months ago, up to now, very little, if anything, has happened.

As has been suggested, the conditions here are appallingly inadequate. My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore mentioned each member of staff having 60 sq ft. Conditions will get worse as Members need to employ more staff and more equipment is used.

It is interesting that conditions are so bad that our work force is exempt from the protection of employment conditions that we have enacted for everyone else. Therefore, they work for us at a legal as well as physical disadvantage. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) gave us the benefit of his experience in industry. He said that he has been here five and a half years and does not even have a desk for his secretary.

After I had been here for six years I did not have a desk for myself. I came in 1964 and in 1967 I became a Minister. That was the first time I had any territorial claim on the Palace of Westminster. However, the accommodation was not for me but went with the office. When the great British electorate made an ill-considered decision in 1970 I found my total claim on the House of Commons had been contracted to a pile of cardboard boxes tied up with string with "A. Williams" written on the side and "To be collected" in small print underneath. The trouble was that there was nowhere to take those boxes. I had to do what one or two other hon. Members had done. I explored the building and I found a corridor above the Aye Lobby, so in 1970, I bundled up those papers and walked up to the corridor. There were some tables there and I just put my papers on them.

I began to get courteous notes from the then Serjeant at Arms, or one of his deputies, asking if I would be kind enough to move the papers so that someone could dust around them, and I equally politely said that the moment that I was provided with somewhere to put the papers, I would gladly move them. Two years later, the war of attrition paid off, so by 1972, although I did not get an official desk, I was allowed to continue squatting and the Serjeant at Arms' office said that it would even give me a filing cabinet. Eventually, those two corridors had to be pressed into use. It was not until 1974, 10 years after I entered the House, when I again became a Minister, that I had a desk that belonged to me in the House of Commons.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore paid tribute to Mary Frampton. Some of us signed an early-day

[Mr. Alan Williams]

motion because we did not want her to feel that her departure was unrecorded by the House. I understand that she, whom I have to thank for that first filing cabinet—the endorsement, the rubber-stamping of my squatting in the Palace of Westminster—is to grow shrubs. I would love to be a fly on the wall as she is talking to those shrubs. I suspect that she will have the tidiest shrubbery in the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore is too solicitous for the well-being of the Leader of the House. Much as we all love and respect the right hon. Gentleman, my hon. Friend should not be deceived by the little slum along the corridor. That is for presentation purposes only. He does not want us to think that our landlord is living in better conditions than we are. I would gladly swap with him if, in addition to the meagre office that he has here —it is twice or three times the size of those that we have —I also had the rather decorative little cubbyholes on Whitehall to which he is able to retreat. Sympathy by all means, but let us make sure that it goes where it belongs, which is here with most hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) put forward a proposition, which I do not think she meant frivolously, that it might make more sense to give people money to rent their own accommodation, rather than providing it here. I understand the doctrinal element behind this suggestion, but there is a practical point. The real difficulty in this place, and one of the constraints that faces everyone in planning for accommodation, is that whoever has accommodation has to have accommodation that is available at all hours of day and night and that is within a sufficiently short distance for hon. Members to be able to get from there to the House within the time allowed for a Division. The longer we extend that time, the longer we extend the sittings of the House of Commons.

A private market solution might make sense if we were working normal office hours and could persuade the Chief Whips on both sides to be courteous enough to ensure that there were no Divisions during those times. However, as their only delight and pleasure in life seems to be a sadistic joy in calling Divisions at the most inconvenient time for Members, I can only conclude that the hon. Member would be playing into their hands if she were successful in the campaign that she has mounted this morning.

Mrs. Gorman: Would it not be nice to be treated as a grown-up and given the option of either taking facilities here or being allowed to choose facilities? At the moment, rooms are allocated in a primitive way—that is, on a pecking order basis of a lovely room if one is a Minister, and nothing much if one is not.

Mr. Williams: When there is so little accommodation, there has to be some sort of order. My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore can tell us how difficult it is to determine who should have what. We have all been, as we see it, the victims of inadequate resources here. That is another possibility and I suggest that the hon. Lady takes it up with the Lord President of the Council.

I used to have an office in Norman Shaw, but I left it because I found that it was hopeless for me. By the time I got over here for a meeting, with another meeting in an hour's time, I would have to decide whether I went back to my room or stayed here. We find ourselves picking up a newspaper, or, if we are unusually diligent, wandering into the Library. We may sustain ourselves with a cup of coffee, but we waste a great deal of time. If that option is adopted, surely hon. Members will say that, in addition to having accommodation outside the House, they still need somewhere where they can rest their briefcases within Division bell distance. We would end up with hon. Members wanting the best of both worlds. They would want the money for outside accommodation and, at the same time, a base available to them in the Commons.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has designs on Westminster Hall.

Mr. Tony Banks: It would make a very nice office.

Mr. Williams: My hon. Friend put forward some colourful and interesting propositions for its use. However, once again, the great problem that we have all had to face over the years is the overriding problem of security. We could reconcile some of his wishes with some of those of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). Hon. Members who have had to show parties around the building have been apologetic and ashamed because they have had to keep groups of pensioners or young children waiting in pouring rain to go through the security screen when there is all that empty space where we could have a bank of security screens and people could wait under shelter.

I put it to the Lord President that the way in which we treat our constituents who come here to see Parliament is a public scandal. We treat them as if they were privileged to come and look when, in fact, we are privileged to be here. They are entitled to come and look and we should make the facilities available for them to do so. We want people to show an interest in Parliament. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will consider that matter seriously and discuss it with those of his colleagues responsible for such decisions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West floated the idea of a constituency means test, which he admitted would be rather difficult to adjudicate. I regard that as an even more impossible task than allocating rooms in the House in any sane way and I suspect that we shall be unable to make progress on that proposition.

Mr. Tony Banks: It would not be a question of giving Members of Parliament tranches of money because that would be too difficult. Members would have staff allocated to them through the Fees Office and would take those members of staff only if they felt it was necessary to do so. That would be a way of dealing with the problem. A Member could say to the Fees Office, "I think I can justify four members of staff working for me." No doubt there would be some empire-building by some hon. Members, but those Members who do not want large numbers of staff would not abuse the system.

Mr. Williams: Obviously, local government has a far greater ratio of saints than does central Government. I am touched that the faith built up by my hon. Friend during his period working on the GLC leads him to think that our colleagues would behave in so judicious and forthright a manner.

My hon. Friend also said that some Members are not as effective as others because they do not make as many speeches. I regret the fact that some hon. Members make even the few speeches that they do make, but I do not think that my hon. Friend would agree that the sole measure by which we should judge the contributions of hon. Members to the House of Commons is the number of speeches that they make here. My hon. Friend makes many speeches, but we are not all able to sustain the quality of contribution that he is. We would therefore be setting a false criterion by which our constituents would judge us if we were to take up his suggestion. His ideas about the use of county hall are well worth while and are worth investigating further. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West, I am disappointed that every time we discuss, consider or have a report on progress, there appears to be further slippage to report. I suspect—though I hope not —that today we shall hear about a further retreat of our timetable. We have a unique opportunity to contribute to the smooth running of future Parliaments. We owe it to them to give consideration to all aspects.

The catering facilities have also been mentioned, and all of us are daily aware of the difficulties experienced by the catering staff in meeting the enormous demands of the House of Commons. I hope that when new facilities are envisaged across the way that they will be available to everyone who works here. We need adequate resources for hon. Members, but I hope that the resources in the new building will also be available to those who work in the House, as certain parts of our cafeteria and self catering area are at present.

I noticed in the report—or it may have been evidence given to the Committee on behalf of the Catering and Refreshment Department—mention of the possibility of private dining facilities. I hope that we will regard that as low priority until we have ensured that the real and legitimate needs of all those who work in the House are served. We should not just consider our needs, as we are a small fraction. The catering requirements within this building are enormous and until those are fully met we should not be giving much priority to the provision for outside or private dining groups, even if they are lucrative.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow referred to exercise facilities. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) was a little disdainful about that in her comments. Having been here only a short time, she is lucky that she has not suffered the ravages which the sedentary existence in this place imposes upon most of us. My hon. Friend made a realistic point. I am not suggesting that there should be lavish facilities. I believe that they should be health-based facilities. As the Leader of the House will confirm, most of us are in this building between 9 am and 10 am and are still trapped here most evenings until some time after 10 pm. Even where there is the will, it is virtually impossible to find the opportunity to keep oneself in sensible physical trim. It is not an exotic demand by Members of Parliament, but a sensible one. I am sure that I shall make a great many enemies, in saying that those facilities should be considered, even if it means that those who like shooting have to give way to those who like surviving.

Several hon. Members have gone out of their way to pay tribute to the House of Commons Library. We must differentiate between the activities of our Library and the normal library service. We have a wonderful back-up service. In fact, the Library is the source of rapid information for a large number of hon. Members on a large number of subjects. By the nature of our business, it is often only in the morning, or even during the lunch hour, that one discovers that there will be a statement that very afternoon, and then information is needed in a great hurry. We put enormous demands on the Library. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow mentioned that some consideration should be given to the need to sustain the instant contact and instant availability that we value so much.

The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) referred to the lifts in the House. I share the lift service that he mentioned. I have a low-cost option to offer the Minister. Perhaps the Lord President of the Council would like the term "express" to be checked under the trades descriptions legislation, and conformity required. As that is unlikely, perhaps we could have a coffee-vending machine in the lift, so that we can at least have a cup while we are on our way between the principal floor and our rooms.

Mr. Holt: The right hon. Gentleman need not worry about cost. If he were to sell the lift to the British Museum, he would make more money than the cost of replacement.

Mr. Alan Williams: A serious point that must be contemplated is that we are dependent on recruiting many young people to do secretarial and research work here. As Ministers and industry constantly warn us, there will be a shortage of young people in the 1990s. It will become more necessary for young women to be encouraged to go back to work perhaps earlier than they tend to return at the moment.

Some hon. Members have not been terribly sympathetic to the requirement for creche facilities within the Palace of Westminster. I suspect that, whether we want to or not, in the 1990s we shall compete with high-paying employers for a more limited range of people with much-desired specialities. Circumstances will force us to make greater facilities available.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow asked for an assurance that resources will be available for the completion of the work. It is to be done stage by stage. I can understand that. I can appreciate the difficulty in which Ministers find themselves. They do not want to buy a pig in a poke; they want to know exactly what they are paying for. However, there is also the reverse side of the coin. It is difficult to stage the provision of resources. When planning stage 1, one cannot be sure that stages 2 or 3 will definitely be financed in the envisaged form. Clearly, any doubt about subsequent stages may alter the priorities that the planners and the Committee would require.

There have been numerous comments about the ever-expanding need for space within the Palace of Westminster. I have bad news for the Minister. In yesterday's newspaper, I saw an item labelled:

> "MPs pay £300 to look good on TV".

It went on to state that 40 image-conscious MPs were to get advice on hairstyle, clothes and colour co-ordination as part of a training course.

The Committee has not taken that point into account. There now appears to be a need for make-up rooms, changing rooms, and so on. I notice that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) is of a different persuasion on the need for such training. He said:

> "If any MPs pay out for that, they need their heads seeing to."

We see how rapidly the need for facilities expands. Not only do we want facilities for make-up but we shall need consulting facilities as well.

[Mr. Alan Williams]

We are not planning just for ourselves. I have said that before, and I emphasise it. There is a tendency for us to think purely in terms of our personal needs as Members of Parliament. We are planning for the needs of all those who work here, including those who do not work directly for us. We say that we want accommodation for secretaries and researchers, but we should remember that thousands of people who are not directly employed by Members of either House will be affected by our decisions.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) spotted the reference to space for broadcasters and asked if the Leader of the House could say how the broadcasting centre links to the work of the Comittee that the Leader of the House chairs and on which my right hon. Friend sits. It is the Select Committee on Televising of Proceedings of the House. My right hon. Friend would like to know whether there is overlap and due consultation between the two groups. Now that the Leader of the House is aware of the matter, I am sure that he will correspond with my right hon. Friend.

Despite the inevitability that, to some extent, we have become lost in detail and in the narration of our own horrific experiences about trying to accommodate our work needs to the absolutely inadequate resources available here, we must still bear in mind the long-term feature of what we are discussing. Even if the proposal goes ahead there will still be a shortage of space for current demand, let alone projected demand. That which we build in the next decade will be for use in the next century and beyond. We will make the decisions but we must remember that many current hon. Members may not enjoy the facilities when they are completed. We will bequeath what we decide to our successors. Our aim should be to see that they inherit buildings in which they can not only work effectively but of which they can be proud.

1.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): I begin by thanking everybody who has participated in the debate and congratulating the Services Committee on its report. About 10 hon. Members have spoken in the debate and all the speeches were excellent. Although this is only an Adjournment debate, it is clear that the House has reached a consensus on the recommendations in paragraph 29. That means that the way will be clear for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to put down the motion that he suggested when he outlined his intentions at the start of the debate.

This is the first debate on the accommodation needs of the House since November 1983. That is not a sign that the House or the Government are complacent, because an enormous amount of work has been put in during the intervening period by those on the Services Committee, the officials who support it and the members of the Property Services Agency. Despite what some hon. Members have said, I can report to the House that there is a good working relationship between the Services Committee under the excellent chairmanship of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and the Property Services Agency. I look forward to that continuing. That does not mean that the PSA should be above criticism or that it should fail to respond to criticism. I am aware that some criticism was levelled at it in the debate.

The efforts put in have produced reports but now we can see much progress on the ground with work continuing on phase 1 and on the Cannon row refurbishment. Before I deal with some of the detailed points raised in the debate, I should like to thank hon. Members who paid tribute to the work of the late John Silkin. I assumed my present responsibilities when John Silkin was still Chairman of the Services Committee. I shall always be grateful to him for the time, advice and hospitality that he gave me. That was in his nature. Notwithstanding the fact that I represented the Conservative party, not the Labour party, he went out of his way to bring me up to date and to make me feel comfortable when attending my first meeting of the Services Committee.

I wish to record the unique contribution that was made to the Palace of Westminster and the conservation of this magnificent building by Sir Robert Cooke. Sadly, since our last debate on these matters he has died. His contribution will be remembered for generations. There are many examples around us of things that have changed as a result of his attention to them. The outstanding publication entitled "The Palace of Westminster" is, in a sense, a lasting memorial to him. I understand that it is still available on book stalls. I recommend those who have not yet obtained a copy of it to accept the advice that it is well worth putting on a list of Christmas presents that would be welcomed in the coming season.

I join all those who have thanked Mary Frampton for her 40 years' of service to the House. It is right to thank all the servants of the House for the services that they give day in and day out. It will be well known to secretaries as well as to hon. Members, because of her responsibilities for trying to fit a quart into a pint pot, that Mary Frampton had tremendous responsibilities with a high profile. I think that she took on the responsibility of allocating filing cabinets as well as desks. It is interesting to note that as recently as 1960 it was the Leader of the House who seemed to be in charge of filing cabinets. In a debate during that year he made a major announcement that there were to be 25 extra filing cabinets. That is an example of the way in which the expectations of Members have changed. There were changes in expectations between the previous century and this century, of course, but the same applies to recent decades. It will never be easy to keep up with Members' expectations.

A key example arose during the debate when my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) said that 50 sq ft for a secretary was inadequate. Yet it was only a few years ago that very few secretaries had desks. We now have 400 secretaries with desks although only 55 of the desks are in the Palace. In March 1960, there were only 124 secretaries with desks. Moreover, there was no waiting list. It is clear that demand has risen significantly in fewer than 30 years.

The same is true of desks for Members. There was a plebiscite at about the same time—that is 1960—and it was found that only 295 Members wanted desks. There is a desk now for every Member, and we are setting ourselves a new target of every Member having a desk in a room of his own. That shows that progress is being made. It is worth considering the historical context.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Minister give a categorical assurance to the House that my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) has a desk? That needs to be said.

Mr. Chope: It has been said already that it is not compulsory for Members to sit at the desks allocated to them. I understand that the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) does not choose to sit at the desk which has been allocated to him. There is a desk available to him if he wishes to use it. It may not be as large as he would like, but it is there if he wishes to use it. I am sure that there is a telephone for him, if he wants it. During the debate in 1960, some hon. Members said that it was not necessary and not desirable that each desk should be accompanied by a telephone. There are moves afoot now to install expensive IT equipment around the House to bring communication facilities up to date. Those are examples of the way in which there has been evolution over relatively recent years.

In answering some of the points that were raised earlier, I shall begin by referring to what is happening at Cannon row. The House is aware of the refurbishment that is being carried out there and I assure the House that the target date for completion in summer 1989 is still on schedule. That is later than we had hoped and I explained some of the reasons for that when I gave evidence to the Select Committee.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House used the expression

"broadly on schedule for completion"

when speaking about phase 1 of the new building. I cannot add to that, except to say that I visited the site, put on a hard hat and spoke to the contractors about the paramount importance of the contract being completed on time. There have been problems there, but I hope that they will be overcome and that the work will be completed on schedule. We have not relaxed our objective that the building should be completed on time. It is partly because of the extra resources that have gone into that exercise that we have not made such fast progress on the preliminary work for the phase 2 project, following the recommendations of the Services Committee report. It is not correct to say that we have made no progress. A draft brief has been finalised, which will go out to fee bidding by firms of architects. Five firms of architects are on the short list at present and I hope to be able to appoint the architects before next Easter. We shall put our major effort into ensuring that phase 1 is delivered on time, as the House wishes.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) raised the question of funds. Funds are made available year by year and it would be unreasonable to expect that all the funds could be allocated for phase 2 when we have not yet received a report from the architects and we do not have precise estimates of the costs.

The best evidence of the Government's commitment to spending money on facilities in the Palace of Westminster and the outside buildings is what we have already done. In 1983, annual expenditure was about £10 million, but it has now increased to about £20 million. I am pleased that we have been able to include in the forthcoming programme a start on restoring the Victoria tower, which has stood out as being a part of the Palace that has not been restored. We have the resources to do that, preliminary studies are under way and work will be started as soon as the existing work on the Central Lobby tower is completed.

The Property Services Agency and officials have to respond to changing circumstances in this magnificent and ancient building. Only a relatively short time ago, no one could have anticipated the amount of work that we must carry out on the Central Lobby tower immediately and on the Upper Waiting Hall during the next summer recess, because of the weakness of the floor.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack)—who apologises for having to return to his constituency and missing the end of the debate—suggested that it was lack of offices that took many hon. Members away from the Chamber. I am not sure that I agree. Although I do not argue against offices, if there were no offices at all there would probably be more people in the Chamber. But that is about the only point on which I disagree with my hon. Friend. I agree about the need to complete phase 1 on time. The Government do not intend to be penny-pinching, but we wish to obtain good value for money. As for the interiors of phases 1 and 2, my hon. Friend is in the best position to investigate the idea of a patronage scheme for works of art as part of the refurbishment.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked 10 specific questions. The last one does not deserve an answer from me, but I shall do my best to answer the others. In the short term, we shall have no more facilities available for working peers, but we are spending money on improved refreshment facilities. When we can vacate Nos. 6 and 7 Old Palace yard, provision will be made there for offices for working peers.

The hon. Gentleman hoped that the Library would not go across the road. I do not know precisely what he meant by that. The House has already decided that the Library will be the major occupant of phase 1, giving up space in this building and in Norman Shaw.

Mr. Dalyell: I was referring to the fact that Dr. John Poole and his science section and a number of others have had to move away from the centre, where they were often required to answer urgent queries. It is sad that that happened.

Mr. Chope: I cannot comment on that. The major move of the Library will not take place until phase 1 is completed.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the nature of the competition. It will not be an architectural competition on the basis of the Royal Institute of British Architects' understanding of such a competition. It will be a fee-bidding procedure, after firms of architects have prequalified on the basis of being suitable and having the experience necessary to design for such a sensitive site.

Mr. Dalyell: It is all very well to say that it will be a fee-bidding process, but how can we be certain that we get the distinguished design that hon. Members on both sides of the House have made it clear that they want?

Mr. Chope: It is for the House to decide, once the architect has been appointed and has responded to the requirements of the Sub-Committee, whether it likes the resulting design. To proceed in any other way on the Palace chambers site would involve much more delay. One difficulty with RIBA design competitions is that the firms

[Mr. Chope]

which win do not always have enough experience or resources to play a full part in the work. We need an experienced firm of architects.

Mr. Tony Banks: Why not ask Prince Charles to be the judge?

Mr. Chope: That will not arise. There will be no judgment of the designs.

Dr. Godman: Will the House have the power to reject an undistinguished proposal by the successful architect?

Mr. Chope: Certainly that is a matter for the House to decide. I am sure that the architect chosen will do his best to ensure that he produces a design that has the support of the House because if it does not have the House's support he will not get the commission to carry on the work.

Looking further ahead, the hon. Member for Linlithgow asked about decanting. That is a long way ahead. It will obviously be a difficult matter to resolve, but we shall try to do our best. The Government's thinking on patronage of British artists is outside my area. However, the works of art committee under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) could pay some attention to the scope for patronage of British artists in the purchase of any works of art for the building.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow also asked what extra costs would be incurred if there was a delay in decking over the underground from the first part of phase 2 to a subsequent stage of phase 2. The answer to that question is contained in the evidence to the New Building Sub-Committee on page 4, question 5 in which the PSA superintending architect said that there were

> "None that we can identify at this stage. That is not to say that there will not be any."

Mr. Dalyell: Does that apply in the context of archaeology? That is the problem.

Mr. Chope: Archaeologists came on to the site before phase 1 started and were paid by the PSA. I do not think that there will be much scope for archaelogical investigation on the phase 2 site because almost all the buildings will remain except for the Palace chambers rebuilding. Also, much of the site has already been excavated as it is crossed by an Underground railway line.

Points were also raised about the facilities for broadcasters. Obviously the facilities in Bridge street are unsatisfactory at the moment, but the House must recommend any changes. The Services Committee previously recommended 20,000 sq. ft. It would be sensible for that recommendation to await the results of the Select Committee report into televising Parliament.

The House already has a self-financing gymnasium under the auspices of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker). If anyone requests exercise facilities in the new building, the House can resolve that request. Ultimately it would be for the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee to consider that.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow's concern about the Crypt chapel font is well known. We have had discussions with English Heritage and an agreement has been reached to dig up part of Old Palace yard to see how or where the water is seeping in. I hope that we will be able to get to the bottom of that problem. The speculation is that the leak has been caused by war damage.

I agree wholehearted with the hon. Member for Linlithgow that it is important to get the fabric of the building absolutely right at the design stage. With regard to facilities for visitors, I have seen the early-day motion recommending an awning for the Line of Route. I understand that the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee is discussing that matter with the House of Lords so I cannot take that further today. I hope that I have answered most of the points raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow.

Mr. Dalyell: I thank the Minister very much.

Mr. Chope: I cannot go into such detail on all the other points raised during the debate having regard to the time. I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) that architects will be appointed to do a feasibility study into the conversion of Speaker's court so that that accommodation does not lie vacant for more than a minimum period after the completion of phase 1.

I understand that the parliamentary bookshop is to be run as an in-house enterprise. Exactly what will be provided is still to be decided and, again, that is a matter for the House to resolve in detail. There are certainly to be shops along the Bridge street end of the Victoria embankment, as at present, and phase 1 includes a shop in the Refreshment Department area. I do not think that any decision has been taken on what it will stock, but there should be scope for stocks to meet day to day needs.

Mrs. Gorman: Is my hon. Friend aware that the British Airports Authority is installing shops in hospitals? It might like to instal a shop for us on a contract basis.

Mr. Chope: That is an interesting suggestion. It is for a Committee of the House to consider whether we wish to move from the principle that has been decided on until now—that the shop will be run as an in-house enterprise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) made in her inimitable way a thoughtful and challenging speech. I agree that anything free at the point of consumption increases demand and that the temptation of free space could lead to a waste of accommodation. It is one thing to put forward that proposition, but rather more difficult to find a solution which would ensure that there was not increased demand. I can see that even under present arrangements there is a difficulty because if a Member employs a secretary within the precincts of the Palace, the telephone facility is free and the Member does not even have to charge it against allowances, whereas if a Member employs a secretary in the constituency and does not trouble the House for accommodation, he or she must charge both the costs of the telephone and the costs of heat, light and rent against allowances. My hon. Friend's point might bear further investigation.

My hon. Friend spent some time talking about corruption in the PSA. Today's debate gives me an opportunity to say that the trial concluded yesterday is the last of a series which has resulted in eight PSA officials being convicted of a series of offences of corruption which have brought tremendous disgrace on the PSA. Eight officials have made life difficult for some 22,000 employees, but I hope that neither my hon. Friend nor anyone else would tar the whole organisation with the same brush because of the admittedly heinous activities of that minority. Moreover, all the matters on which they were convicted date back to 1984. Since then there have been major administrative changes in the PSA to ensure that such corruption cannot recur.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Minister blaming the Labour Government?

Mr. Chope: No, I am not blaming any Government. I blame loose procedures which were exploited by an irresponsible group of employees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) spoke about the lifts. I do not know whether the particular faults were reported.

Mr. Holt: They were.

Mr. Chope I shall ensure that action is taken. We have an ongoing programme of replacing the lifts. It is extensive but it is programmed over a period of years. It should be coupled with a maintenance programme which ensures that if a lift is out of order it remains out of order only for a short period.

Mr. Holt: The lift to which I referred earlier was out of action for the whole of the summer recess. If the experience of those of us who were in the Norman Shaw building when they installed the new lift there is anything to go by, I shall have no faith in the lifts. After that lift was installed and put into operation, it was out of service for a longer period than it was in service during its first nine months. I see an official at the back of the Chamber nodding.

Mr. Chope: I share my hon. Friend's concern, and I shall look into the matter.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) referred in passing to the use of county hall as the new parliamentary building. It is the first time that I have heard him make that suggestion. I thought that he wanted to keep county hall for London government purposes. It would be wholly inappropriate for the House to extend its empire to the county hall area. I look forward to private sector use of that fine building and the surrounding area.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister must know what is to happen to county hall. He has plenty of time yet in which to reply to the debate, so could he tell the House when an annnouncement is to be made about the future use of county hall?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We must deal with one building at a time.

Mr. Chope: I have to respond to the hon. Gentleman's question by saying that I must observe the ruling of the Chair on that matter.

Mr. Ray Powell: The purpose of this debate is for the House to declare a preference for one of the schemes that have been put before us. Having listened to the debate, is the Minister able to say what preference the House has declared?

Mr. Chope: The views of the House very much reflect the views of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), of which the hon. Gentleman is Chairman. The House would like the redevelopment of Palace chambers to proceed rapidly. It would also like consideration to be given at a later stage to decking over the Underground station. It is a blend of PSA proposals and the Casson Conder proposals, with the gloss that has been placed upon them by the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services). The best way to put it is that the House seems to have agreed unanimously with the recommendations of the hon. Gentleman's Committee.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) asked two questions about the proposed subway. He asked whether there might be a subway shuttle, as in the United States. I had not expected that suggestion to be included in the architect's brief, but if the Committee chooses to include it that will be a matter for it. The subway will be open only to passholders and it will serve the buildings on the other side of Bridge street.

I very much appreciate that Members and staff work in less than satisfactory conditions. The House is at one on that. Better offices are needed, and they must be given high priority. Cannon row will provide some relief. Phase 1 will provide even more. After today's debate, we are about to embark on the next serious and exciting phase, and I am grateful for the support that the House has given to it.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Channel Tunnel (Rail Link)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

1.33pm

Miss Anne Widdecombe (Maidstone): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the issue of compensation for people who will be affected by the proposed high-speed rail link between the Channel tunnel and London, running through Kent. I sincerely hope that, in the event, my constituents will not be affected.

British Rail has proposed four routes for the high-speed railway. The fourth has been dropped as being too costly and taking too long to construct. One of the three remaining routes will affect my constituents very badly. The other two give rise to points that I am raising on behalf of the people of Kent generally, rather than of my constituents alone.

Routes one or two should be chosen. I have to agree with the Chairman of Eurotunnel, Alistair Morton, who says that he can see no good reason why we are even still considering route three. Whichever route is chosen will cause problems for the people of Kent and there are objections to be advanced against all three. Therefore we must consider whether there are any positive reasons for accepting any of the routes and whether they provide any benefit for the people of Kent.

The prospects with routes one and two are quite good. First, there is the possibility of an economic boost for the Medway, which traditionally has been the poorer part of Kent. Secondly, there is the possibility of an improved rail commuter service, of a parkway at Maidstone, and, not least, of a link with the north through King's Cross. That must surely play a fairly major part in British Rail's long-term plans.

More important, all Kent is up in arms over the environmental threat from the high-speed railway. Routes one or two could probably be put through tunnels, and certainly through cuttings, for much of their length. Route three runs across the Weald with its wet clay soil, and the line would have to be raised. As such, it would be unsightly and noisy and the environmental damage would be very much greater than from routes one and two. Thus there is no advantage in it, especially as it would be slower than route one, and on this high-speed link the faster the service the higher the revenue for British Rail, and more costly than route two. I see no reason why we are still considering it and why my constituents cannot be immediately relieved of their fear, their worry and the planning blight that is caused by this wholly pointless route. Alistair Morton can see no point in it, nor can British Rail, and nor can the people of Kent.

Enormous questions are raised about compensation for people along the chosen route. I have made available in advance the points that I shall raise both with the Minister and British Rail in the hope that I shall obtain some fairly clear and definite answers, at least where possible. The issues are complex. We have built no new railways since the turn of the century and our compensation laws are therefore inadequate and in a mess. The laws that apply to motorways do not apply in the same way to railways, which leaves far too little protection for Kent constituents who are affected by the new project.

So worried are my constituents that they have formed a campaign to save the heart of Kent—the Weald, Bourne valley and the villages that will be destroyed should route three be chosen. The village of Collier Street will become competely unrecognisable. Headcorn and Staplehurst will be sandwiched between two railway lines and a naturally beautiful part of Kent will be destroyed. Those are just some of the disadvantages.

It has been suggested that the building of a high-speed rail link will mean also a more intensive use of existing track, perhaps to carry more freight or perhaps to cope with the extra custom that British Rail expects. Residents near a railway line that carries no traffic between 11.30 pm and 6 am may sleep undisturbed throughout the night. But if the line is used more intensively, with trains running through the night, no statutory compensation is provided for the people who suffer from the consequent noise. Compensation, would, however, have been payable when the line was built. Thousands of people in Kent will be affected if there is, as is generally projected, an intensification of use. I should like to hear some solid proposals for helping those people.

I do not join in the general bashing of British Rail that has been prevalent recently. British Rail had a hopeless task. It had to produce four hideous propositions, take them into the heart of Kent and sell them to people who were to be affected by them. Inevitably, it has been castigated for mistakes which it undoubtedly made. The people trying to sell the proposals were not official public relations men but British Rail officials. They did a good job, and are continuing to do so, under difficult circumstances.

I am extremely grateful to British Rail for agreeing to make ex gratia payments to some of my constituents. Those payments must be ex gratia because, by law, British Rail is not obliged to provide compensation to persons affected by the route until the Bill needed to authorise the scheme receives Royal Assent. In the ordinary course of events, given that the project will probably proceed through Parliament under the auspices of a private Bill, and as we have yet to have decisions from Kent county council and British Rail, and they will have to wait for the matter to come before Parliament, it could be two years before that Royal Assent is granted.

However, British Rail has recognised the practical difficulties, one of which has already affected dozens of my constituents. People who had started to sell their houses before the routes were announced believed that the sales would go through. They therefore entered into commitments to buy elsewhere, sometimes in a completely different part of the country, to accommodate job moves and so on. When the routes were published the purchasers of their properties backed out. The vendors were stuck without compensation until Royal Assent. However, British Rail very properly agreed to make ex gratia payments to them to ease their financial burden. That is all very well for the people who had already started the sale process, but the position between now and Royal Assent of those hundreds of people who have not started the sale process but who will want, for perfectly genuine reasons, to sell their houses, is not clear.

British Rail has promised a package of assistance before the route is chosen. Again I offer my thanks.

However, it is wholly unacceptable that there is no proper legal provision or guidance about how people should be treated in those circumstances. For example, I understand that in some EEC countries when railway disturbance is caused, not only is the property bought, as it would be here, through compulsory purchase, but a disturbance premium is paid in addition. Will our constituents get a disturbance premium, or will they merely get the compulsory purchase value? How will the value be determined? The market value of houses in Kent is extremely high. Once the chosen route is announced, the market value of the houses on it will decline. Will compensation be payable at the current market value, or at the prevailing market value when my constituents finally sell?

Agricultural land gives rise to many other problems. Whatever route is chosen, some farmers' land will obviously be required. Will they simply be compensated for the price of the land, or will the compensation also reflect the loss of income from that land? If they move the activities on that land elsewhere on the farm, it will take many years before the new location becomes income bearing. Will they be compensated for that? How will compensation be assessed when the land is purchased? Will it be based on agricultural land prices, which are not wonderful, or on development land prices, which, in the south-east, are? May we be told now, or do my constituents have to worry for a further two years about the basis of compensation?

Then there are those who fall outside the compulsory purchase bracket, but who will still be mightily affected by the railway. Again, that will apply no matter which route is chosen. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), who is here, is one of those hon. Members who are extremely worried about the plight of their constituents. There is a law on injurious affection, which I am informed has nothing to do with unfortunate love affairs, but is about being affected by noise, unsightliness or other such factors. That law was never designed to cover the impact of a railway.

Believe it or not, there is no statutory maximum noise limit on railways. There is a noise level above which compensation must be paid and noise bafflement measures must be taken, but a railway may emit any amount of noise. If this project leads to increased railway activity, there will be a fantastic increase also in noise. The people affected do not know what compensation they would get. There is no defined corridor within which it will be paid. Will it be paid to people who live within 200 yards of the railway, or within 400 yards? Will it depend on whether there are cuttings or embankments? Will it be measured with a noise meter? Nobody appears to know.

Will people get money if they find that their living conditions become intolerable? Will they simply be given double glazing and told to get on with it? Will any account be taken of the complete destruction of a beautiful part of the country and of such views as our constituents may have enjoyed in the past? How exactly will the injurious affection law be applied?

It is easy to concentrate solely on residential properties, and most of the pronouncements from British Rail have been in respect of such properties and, very occasionally, of agricultural holdings. However, another class of person will be badly affected by the railway—the business man, particularly, the small business man.

I am beginning to receive quite a few letters from such people—one is in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling—who are losing orders because of the railway. Home improvement firms are particularly affected. They have had orders to build conservatories, for example, but suddenly their customers, believing that they might lose their properties, have cancelled those orders. The problem applies to people selling all sorts of goods and services in the affected areas. Will such people be compensated for loss of income? How long will they have to wait? Will they have gone into liquidation by the time any compensation is proposed? What will be done for businesses?

It is difficult to produce a full package of measures to deal with a completely new set of circumstances, but surely it was realised that the day would inevitably come when a new railway track would have be be built. It must have been realised that we could not go on for ever without any expansion of the rail network. It must have been clear that any major railway construction project would have presented complex and manifold problems. However, insufficient thought was given before the proposals were announced to ensuring that the necessary laws were on the statute book or that British Rail, as a nationalised industry, was given firm guidance.

There are many points that I have not raised, partly because time will not allow and partly because they are so numerous that I would not know where to begin. However, I can assure my hon. Friend the Minister that I have received thousands of letters, the vast bulk of which is against route three. Many of those letters contain heart-rending pleas from my constituents who are suffering personally as a result of the railway line.

To those people the choice of route, the method of calculating the compensation, and the permitted noise levels are personal, not academic, matters. Whichever route is chosen, constituents somewhere will be affected. However, wherever they are, the compensation laws that will cover them are in a mess. Ad hoc and emergency provision and ex gratia payments are not enough. We need a complete and utter overhaul of our compensation laws.

1.52 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I should like to start by congratulating most warmly my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) on securing this Adjournment debate, which is on a matter of the greatest interest and concern to thousands of people in Kent, from one end of the county to another. I thank her for allowing me to intervene briefly in her debate.

As we all know, planning blight can occur instantly and to individuals with the utmost severe effect. That has been precisely the position in Kent since the day that British Rail published its proposals in July of this year. British Rail took a conscious decision to publish not merely one corridor, but a total of three corridors through various parts of the county, magnifying the blighting effect. In doing so, it has destroyed the value of thousands of people's properties as of now and, in many other cases, it has substantially reduced that value.

Those people—and there will be such people at any moment—who are having to move simply because their jobs have changed, because there has been a change in their personal circumstances or because there are

[Sir John Stanley]

tragedies, bankruptcy or severe financial pressure in their families which have forced the realisation of capital assets, are now having to try to sell their homes.

It is grossly unfair, completely unreasonable and inequitable that any individual should be made to suffer the loss of half, two thirds or virtually 100 per cent. of the value of what is in most cases his only major asset, simply because of the publication of these proposals by a public sector body. I make it clear to my hon. Friend the Minister of State that this is the responsibility not only of British Rail, but of the Government. The proposals published by British Rail can only have been published with the approval of the Secretary of State for Transport. He must have approved publication, because he initiated these studies. The Government must have known that, by sanctioning the act of publication, they would confer instantaneous and severe planning blight from one end of Kent to the other. Therefore, a real responsibility lies with the Government, as well as with British Rail, to clear up the severe difficulties created.

Within a matter of days of the publication of these proposals, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State will know, I asked our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to initiate an ex gratia compensation scheme. I am grateful to him and our right hon. Friend that that call was heeded, and that British Rail has come forward with at least an ex gratia compensation scheme of some sort. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone has so cogently and eloquently stated, the scope of the scheme is entirely inadequate in the present circumstances. Frankly, it is a lottery as to whether a property falls within or outside the scope of the scheme. It depends largely on whether the property is adjudged to be one which will be compulsorily acquired by British Rail. The fact is that few properties are judged by British Rail to fall within the scope of the compulsory purchase powers. However, because they are a few yards away from the boundaries of the embankments to the line, does not mean that the value of these properties will not be drastically affected. At present there could be two homes side by side, one falling within the scope of the ex gratia scheme and the other—though virtually equally affected—falling outside. That is an inequity and an anomaly that is not tolerable. I ask my hon. Friend to reach the position as fast as possible where the basic principles of the Land Compensation Act are applied, as they apply to similar projects for which his Department has responsibility, notably road schemes.

The basic principle that must be immediately established, is that those who suffer a significant loss in the value of their homes—because of the publication of proposals for new major works by a nationalised undertaking—must be given compensation equal to the full difference between the open market value of their properties before publication of the proposals and after. If my hon. Friend cannot announce acceptance of that proposal today, I hope that he will rapidly work with his right hon. Friend to do so as soon as possible.

1.58 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) for raising this matter. It gives me an opportunity, in a brief intervention, to mention the second rail terminal. Clearly, whichever route is chosen, it will end up in London. The London borough of Newham wants the second terminal to be in Stratford rather than at King's Cross. With the Minister at the Dispatch Box, it is a golden opportunity to ask him a couple of questions. It will at least save me the postage and the letter that I was going to write to him.

The Minister will be aware that about 42 second terminal sites in London were identified. We now seem effectively to be down to two. Out of the four that were left, White City has gone and St. Pancras seems to be highly unlikely, so it is either King's Cross or Stratford. It is clear that British Rail wants the second terminal to be at King's Cross. Frankly, we do not consider that the way in which British Rail is going about the matter—using the private Bill procedure—is a satisfactory way of resolving something that many hon. Members think is of great strategic importance to Greater London and to the south-east generally. The private Bill procedure is wholly inadequate for something of this enormity.

I shall not refer to the report of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, but this is a clear example of the way in which the private Bill procedure should not be used. That is why, at this late stage, I ask the Minister, when he replies to the real fears expressed by the hon. Member for Maidstone and the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), to state what consideration he has given to intervening more directly in the decision-making process on the siting of the second terminal.

Of course there are divisions across the House, just as there is unity. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) has written to the London borough of Camden. He has allowed me to quote from his letter. He wrote:

> "I thought I would let you know that I do not believe the proposed terminal should be at King's Cross because it seems far more logical that it should go to Stratford."

On this occasion, I am delighted to be able to quote the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate in support of my argument.

Will the Minister be prepared to see a delegation from the London borough of Newham—which has made it quite clear that it is ready to receive the terminal at Stratford—consisting of myself, the leader of the council, Fred Jones, and the chairman of planning, councillor Timms? We are not asking the Minister to decide in favour of Stratford. All we are asking for is an opportunity for an objective evaluation to be made of King's Cross and Stratford. We believe that if there is an objective and impartial study, based on the needs of the travelling public, the needs of London and the strategic significance of the project itself, we shall be quite satisfied with the result. We consider that it will inevitably lead to Stratford being selected.

According to our latest advice, it appears that British Rail officers are advising that the board is likely to make a decision on terminal location in February or March 1989. We have little time at our disposal. It will make nonsense of the private Bill procedure, as I have mentioned.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Maidstone for allowing me the opportunity to speak in the debate. Will the Minister now reply and give me for once, some good news to take from the House of Commons to the people of Newham?

2.4 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Michael Portillo): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) on securing this Adjournment debate. The congratulations that I offer her are more than ritualistic on this occasion. She has given the House the first opportunity to discuss the issues arising from the proposal for a new railway line from Folkestone to London for Channel tunnel traffic. I thank her most warmly for that and for the opportunity that it provides for me also to set out the Government's position, to record some remarks about the way forward and, I hope, to deal with certain misapprehensions that may have arisen.

I thank my hon. Friend also for the great courtesy that she has shown towards me in the run-up to the debate. She and I have already had several meetings about the subject, both formal and informal, and she has taken those opportunities forcefully to impress upon me her constituents' case. As she said today, she spoke even more widely for other people in Kent. She has expressed her deep concern to me and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary if State about the anxiety, hardship and difficulty caused in her constituency and elsewhere in Kent by the proposal to build this railway line. She has done so with the commitment and sincerity which characterise her every intervention on behalf of her constituents. On their behalf she has spoken in an impressive and effective manner and I have every sympathy with her and with her constituents. I have no delusions about the great importance of this matter, its impact on people and the anxiety that it produces.

I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent constituencies in Kent, and hon. Members who represent London constituencies that are affected, on their patience and good humour at a time of great difficulty for them and their constituents. I do not mistake their patience for any lack of concern, and frequent visits to Kent have reinforced my understanding of the gravity of this matter.

The House will be aware of the background. There is concern about the capacity of the railway lines and terminals in south-east England as traffic through the Channel tunnel and on to the railways grows following the opening of the tunnel in 1993. There are various estimates of the growth of that traffic, and the British Rail estimates are at the lower end of the range. Other estimates are appreciably higher and those ranges are clearly set out in the British Rail study on long-term route and terminal capacity which was published in July and about which my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and my right hon. Friend for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) spoke. That study leads to the conclusion that, sooner or later, new capacity will be needed in the form of a new railway line. That still leaves open the question of when it will be needed.

British Rail does not see the need for a new line arising for some years, and I do not think that it would see a commercial case for building that line immediately. Others may see a commercial case for immediate building based on existing higher traffic forecasts. Therefore, it is right that British Rail should invite the private sector to show its interest and it has asked that those who wish to pre-qualify should come forward by the end of January 1989. Given British Rail's view that the line will be needed sooner or later, it is right that it should try to establish the route now, so as to provide certainty for the people of Kent and London.

Without intending any discourtesy to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone I should like to reply to the intervention by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) who raised some points about the private Bill procedure. I am acutely aware of the Committee report that he mentioned in passing. For the moment, the House has no way to proceed on the building of railway lines other than by private Bill and there is every precedent for this. In case there is any confusion about the matter, the Bill dealing with King's Cross which has been laid before the House in no way prejudges the decision on terminals. It simply safeguards the site.

I would not go as far as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West in that, as I understand it, there are still three possible sites—White City, Stratford and King's Cross. The considerations will be commercial, which means that the attractiveness to travellers of each site will be taken into account and, in a sense, site costs will be different. There will also be strategic considerations—the connections which exist or could be provided to other parts of London and to the regions. There will be practical difficulties about the route through London and in end the routes may determine the choice of terminal.

I am always delighted to see the hon. Member for Newham, North-West and to discuss such issues. However, the friends that he said he would like to bring to see me would be better advised at this stage to talk to British Rail because they can explain to British Rail the attractions of Stratford. I have no doubt that Stratford will be an important strategic site. It is on the North London line, on the Docklands light railway, connected to the Central line and on the Network Southeast services in the Essex corridor. It stands in the centre of a vast site in British Rail ownership and I am sure that it will play an important part in Britain's transport needs.

I revert to the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling. It is inevitable that the publication of the British Rail report to which I have referred would cause concern in many parts of Kent, but I think that British Rail was right to publish a report containing options. Had it developed plans in secret and presented the world with a fait accompli, it would justifiably have been criticised for excessive secrecy and lack of consultation. As it is, it chose to publish a number of options and to consult widely with local authorities and others affected before making a final choice. That has not been a pleasant process for those who may be affected by one of the corridors identified but I feel sure that it was the right way in which to proceed. It was the best way to ensure that when British Rail comes to make a firm proposal, it is made in the light of observations about the relative merits of the three possible routes and, especially, their impact upon the environment.

It is unfortunate that what should have been a debate about the relative merits of three broad corridors has turned into a discussion about detailed route alignments. It was never intended that at this stage there should be discussion on specific alignments or the effect on particular properties. Paragraph 10.9 of the study states:

> "The routes shown on the map should not be taken as representing a specific alignment, but only a general indication of the areas through which they might pass. The

[Mr. Michael Portillo]

choice of which route should be adopted and its precise alignment cannot be determined without further detailed design work and wider public discussion."

I agree entirely with that. Any more specific discussion at this stage would be premature and inappropriate. We are some way off deciding on which line might be proposed by British Rail. Even when one line is firmly proposed, there will still be the opportunity for further discussion on precise alignment.

It is extremely regrettable that so many people in Kent have been caused so much anxiety. The anxiety of very many will prove to have been caused unnecessarily in that only one line will be proposed. Currently, worry is spread along three routes. I am determined that the present uncertainty which is affecting certain parts of Kent should not be allowed to last any longer than is strictly necessary. The sooner that British Rail is able to identify the preferred corridor, the better.

I have been in frequent contact with Kent county council and British Rail to establish the time that each needs to carry out its necessary procedures. Kent county council has retained consultants to comment. Council members will doubtless wish to receive views from their officers. I understand that the county council expects to have preliminary views by January. Following that important input, British Rail hopes to be able to indentify the preferred corridor soon after that. I took the opportunity of spelling out this likely timetable to the joint consultative committee on the Channel tunnel, which I chaired on Wednesday in Folkestone. Among others, it was attended by Kent county council and the Shepway, Ashford, Dover, Canterbury, Swale and Thanet district councils and the Kent Association of Parish Councils. I recognise that there are other bodies which have an interest.

I have impressed upon British Rail—this it accepts—that its announcement at the beginning of next year should not be confined to the choice of corridor. It recognises the need to spell out also the benefits to Kent. I believe that they derive from the freeing of existing lines and, therefore, less congestion. Unreduced congestion might threaten to block commuter services. There will be the benefit of the freeing of paths for freight along existing lines, which means that there will be less risk of freight drifting back on to the roads of Kent where it is not wanted. There will be the scope that the new line may offer directly to benefit Kent travellers through the provision of new services, such as express commuter services, in a county which is currently poorly served.

I believe that British Rail will wish to spell out also its general approach to environmental protection when it announces its proposal for a line. It will wish to bring forward information on noise. I suspect that that should be prepared independently or verified independently. It will want also to spell out arrangements for compensation for those who are affected by the chosen route. That is an issue to which I shall revert.

I want to make it clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling that it will not be a bargain basement line. British Rail will need authorisation from Parliament for the construction of the new line. The traditional method of statutory authorisation for new railway works is the private Bill procedure, which confers compulsory purchase powers on the promoter and confers the power to operate the railway. Objectors have the opportunity to petition Parliament and their objections can be fully considered by Select Committees in both Houses.

I do not wish to prejudge Parliament's views, but it seems likely that the more British Rail has been able to secure the approval in advance of local authorities, including Kent county council, and their endorsement that the line has been designed with due sensitivity to the environment, the smoother will be the passage of the Bill through Parliament. A line that violated the environment and caused fierce opposition from local authorities and hon. Members would face greater problems in Parliament. I am convinced that a private Bill is the right way to proceed and I see no reason to depart from well-precedented procedure.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said. Although he has given the House an assurance that it will not be a bargain basement operation, he will appreciate that if British Rail builds in the full environmental protection that I and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling expect, the line will become a hugely costly enterprise. How does my hon. Friend square Parliament's insistence on a full environmental package with the Treasury's requirement for a proper internal rate of return?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend has raised an interesting point, to which I shall be coming in a few minutes in the remarks that I intended to make.

I see no reason to depart from well-precedented procedures, nor do I consider that the matter will be affected if the line is constructed in the private sector, with British Rail entering into a toll agreement to run trains along it. The route would still be selected in the way that I have described and the Bill would still be promoted by British Rail.

I hope that what I have said demonstrates that British Rail will need to satisfy Parliament that it has dealt sympathetically with environmental concerns and has made all reasonable efforts to minimise the line's impact. There is no question of the cheapest line being built regardless of wider effects.

I shall now deal with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone. I know that it also concerns my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling because he asked me about it in a written question a week ago. British Rail must have regard to the cost of any environmental protection measures that are proposed. It will not receive any subsidy for the new line and will have to demonstrate a commercial case, so a balance must be struck between commercial and environmental considerations that will satisfy Parliament. I gave my right hon. Friend an assurance in my written answer that the cost of associated environmental works will form part of the capital cost of the project for the purpose of calculating the rate of return.

The commerciality of the line is essentially dependent on the journey times that it can help to achieve. Speed is an important element in British Rail's considerations because speed can bring three vital benefits. More customers will be attracted to the line and those customers will be prepared to pay more, so British Rail will receive a greater share of the joint revenues under the agreement with the Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Francais —the French railway. Some people have seen something peculiar or sinister in that arrangement, but I have not. The agreement simply recognises that the railway which spends money to improve the service should reap the major part of any benefits from those improvements.

The optimum speed of the line is a matter for British Rail, which will have to justify its eventual decision. A balance will have to be struck between commercial and environmental considerations.

I hope that I have made it clear that the decision on the preferred route will be British Rail's, not the Government's. Nor would it be fair to put the local authorities in the position of having to decide, although British Rail will wish to take account of what those authorities advise. Eventually, British Rail will have to justify its decision to Parliament.

In that connection, I make it clear that there is no truth in the suggestion that the Government prefer a particular route. The Government have no basis for expressing such a preference between route options. We expect British Rail to do that on the basis of widespread consultation. Nevertheless, if after reading the record of this debate any of the Kent district councils, Kent county council or the London authorities wish to ask me about the Government's position, I shall be happy to meet them. I explained that when I was in Kent on Wednesday.

The matter of principle concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling is compensation. Although it is many years since anyone built a completely new railway in the United Kingdom, the issues are no different from those raised by the construction of a new road. There has been a tendency for people to think that there is something special about the construction of a railway line. It is a different project, but many of the issues are the same.

The statutory framework for compensation to owners of properties affected will be laid down in the private Act which authorises the construction of the new line. It is normal for such Acts to apply the provisions of the Land Compensation Acts 1961 and 1973. For people whose property is compulsorily acquired, the 1961 Act sets out the basis of compensation, which is market value. Market value is calculated on the basis of the value of the property at the time it is acquired, ignoring the effect of the proposed development but taking into account any private development that might have been allowed had not the scheme for which compulsory powers are being exercised come along. The 1973 Act added to the entitlement a provision for home loss payments for home owners and compensation for expenses incurred in having to move, and compensation for farmers for the loss of livelihood brought about by compulsory purchase of all or part of their land.

For people whose property does not need to be compulsorily purchased, but who are adversely affected by the operation of a new facility, the 1973 Act provides for compensation for depreciation in the value of their property as a result of the use of a new road or railway. It is also normal practice for British Rail to make arrangements for the noise insulation of properties affected when it seeks statutory powers for new works. I understand that the board's proposals for dealing with noise and other environmental issues are being prepared. The method employed will be independently assessed by outside experts before finalising any compensation arrangements.

I refer briefly to my hon. Friend's suggestion that we should institute what she described as the French system of compensating above the value of the property. Traditionally, we have taken the view that it is wrong to use taxpayers' money to give a windfall gain on the value of people's properties, but that is a much broader question.

Miss Widdecombe: Will my hon. Friend draw an analogy with the law of damages? It is not enough merely to buy the property. Damages must be awarded for the worry that has been caused, for the hassle of acquiring a new property and for the financial penalties that the person may have to endure if his property is being bought without account being taken of the injurious effect of the development that has caused his property to be bought. Is there not a series of problems from which a person could suffer and on which, in a civil case, he could sue for damages?

Mr. Portillo: I do not wish to be drawn by my hon. Friend further than to say that the issues that she is putting forward are much the same as those that occur year after year or even day after day in the case of highway developments. Therefore, she is considerably broadening the subject. I do not blame her for that, but I ask her to recognise what she is doing. No doubt she will take heart from the fact that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Environment is on the Front Bench to hear her remarks and doubtless he will want to take account of her case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone also raised the possibility of compensation for people affected by intensification of use of existing railway lines. I find it difficult to accept that it would be right for British Rail to change its long-standing policy in that way. Its policy has always been that people who live near railway lines must expect trains to use them and must take the risk that the traffic might increase. There is also the possibility that it will decrease. That is no different from the position of those living near main roads, who are not entitled to compensation if traffic increases. Many thousands of people up and down the country must feel that they have been affected by roads on which traffic has increased in a way that they did not expect. Similarly, many people may be affected by intensification of the use of railways. Traffic can increase or decrease for a variety of reasons. My hon. Friend's proposal would have enormous consequences over a wide area. The issue goes very much wider than this particular railway line.

My hon. Friend also expressed concern at the restrictive nature of the existing definition of injurious affection and at the basis on which market value, particularly of agricultural land, is calculated under the statutory compensation code. Again I ask my hon. Friend to recognise, without in any way questioning the validity of her argument, that the ramifications of those questions are much wider than the area of transport. I undertake to draw those points to the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of the Environment.

Provisions already exist to compensate property owners affected by the adverse effects of traffic on new railway lines. I appreciate that problems have been caused by the

[Mr. Portillo]

fact that statutory compensation provisions do not come into force until British Rail has acquired statutory powers for the construction of the new line. My hon. Friend was right to make that point. Problems of blight arise particularly where property owners wish to sell properties now and cannot wait until the statutory procedures have been completed to take advantage of the statutory compensation provisions. Like my hon. Friend, I recognise that there is no predicting how long those procedures might take.

British Rail has shown that it is conscious of the problem and it intends to tackle it in two ways. First, it announced on 10 November that it would take action in cases of genuine hardship where individuals are unable to complete the sale of their property. In such cases, British Rail has said that it will buy property situated within any of the three route corridors identified in the report provided that the property is likely to be subject to compulsory purchase if that route is selected as the preferred route. I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling recognised the value of that statement.

Applicants must demonstrate the need to sell their property for reasons other than the rail link proposal. they must also show that reasonable efforts to sell the property have been made and that it could be sold only at a price substantially lower than it might reasonably have been expected to realise. Any dispute about the valuation can be referred to an expert appointed by the president of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. That is a welcome step by the board to relieve the problems of hardship caused by its proposals.

Secondly, British Rail is actively considering the appropriate approach to compensation for implementation when the preferred route is announced. The details are still being considered, but I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling and the House as a whole will welcome British Rail's willingness to go beyond strict statutory requirements. As I said earlier, I recognise the importance of British Rail coming forward at one and the same time with all the elements of the package—the advantages to Kent, the proposal for a line and a statement of what the compensation arrangements will be.

It is clear to the House that a new line between the Channel tunnel and London will be needed at some stage in the future. The alternative is to choke the Kent rail network, which will adversely affect domestic as well as international services. That is a reason why this is not simply a matter of disadvantage, and anxiety to Kent, but has the potential for considerable gain to Kent. That is important.

It being half past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Mr. Portillo: I am pleased that my hon. Friend recognises that there can be advantages to Kent. I hope that the new line will benefit Kent travellers directly. An important part of the commercial case that could be made for this railway line could be that there should be express commuter services running along it. I am pleased that British Rail is examining the scope for such domestic services to use the line.

We all recognise that it is absolutely impossible to build a new line without some impact on the environment and adverse effects on the properties in its path. We need to ensure a reasonable approach to alleviating those effects. British Rail's announcement on 10 November is the first step down that road. I shall discuss with British Rail the approach that it will want to adopt once the preferred route has been announced, until such time as compensation provisions come into effect. I assure the House that the Government will take a close interest in that.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone for this opportunity to debate the matter. I hope that my remarks will be of some help to her and her constituents. I am under no illusion about the importance of this problem. I hope that the matter can be brought to a head as soon as possible so that certainty can reign and people in Kent and in those parts of London which will be affected can know exactly where they stand.

ROF Burghfield

2.32 pm

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am aware of the lateness of the hour, but I see that the Leader of the House is in his place and I have come to raise an urgent matter.

At 6 am there was an explosion at ROF Burghfield. It was heard by local residents, a sheet of flame was seen by eye witnesses and some windows as far as a mile away were shattered. This is of great importance because ROF Burghfield is the manufacturing site of Britain's nuclear warheads. The surrounding villages already show an abnormal leukaemia cluster and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will appreciate the tremendous anxiety of the people in the area because of the explosion. It is essential that we have a statement and I ask the Leader of the House to facilitate one, even at this late hour, from the responsible Minister, so that people can be reassured about radiation leaks and dangers. All too often ROF Burghfield is shrouded in secrecy and people do not know what goes on there.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have no information which is in any way helpful to the House or to the hon. Lady, but of course I shall make inquiries and see what I can find out.

Local Government (Management)

2.33 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): First, I take this opportunity to note the late hour and to thank Mr. Speaker, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to raise a matter on which I feel strongly. I also thank the Minister for sparing time to attend the debate.

I begin by making two brief personal observations. First, all that I want to say about the management of local government services is based on my own personal experience. I served for six years as a council leader. My remarks are not based upon abstract theory. Secondly, I draw the attention of the House to the Register of Members' Interests. It discloses that I am the co-director of the political management programme at Brunel university, where work on this question has been carried on for some time.

Why, then, do I think that these issues need to be aired? Any examination of the management of local government services does not require legislation. That must be welcome news to all hon. Members and to local government everywhere. Legislation alone will not secure the future of local government. All hon. Members want its future to be secured, but legislation is only half the story. It will end abuses but it will not improve services. That requires skilful management. Moreover, any legislation that is passed has to be implemented. That is a challenge for effective local government management.

Another reason for airing the matter on this occasion is that local government management has not been systematically studied during the last 15 years. About 15 years ago the Baines report was published. That report was made by bureaucrats for bureaucrats, not by managers for managers. We must look carefully into the management of local government services, if local government is to flourish. Whatever we may say or think about it, local government is essential and it will not go away.

That begs the question how local government should be managed, if it is not to be managed according to the Baines model or if it is not to be managed as it is now being managed by many authorities. There are three key points to bear in mind.

First, local government should be managed by real managers, not by administrators. Secondly, local government should be managed by an appropriate form of management. Local government is not Marks and Spencer, even if some of us think that it should be. It can never be that. Thirdly, local government services must be managed in a businesslike way, although those services are not businesses. Managing services in a businesslike way amounts to asking for a major cultural change in many organisations. I know from my experience that it also calls for major organisational changes. Both cultural and organisational changes can be traumatic experiences.

We require real managers in local government. The Government can play their role by encouraging real management in local government, by making facilities available for it to develop and, if necessary, by providing funds to speed up the training.

Traditionally, local government services have been administered rather than managed. Among the less endearing features of local government is a strong central core of administration. The power of the treasurer in local government is formidable, awesome and often obstructive.

[Mr. David Wilshire]

Input is the main controlling factor. How much money is put into local government is the main means of control. That does not lead to effective management. Responsibility is devolved to officers who often find that they do not have the authority to go with that responsibility. The story of the person who is responsible for postal services in a local authority not having control over the postal budget or not being able to control the purchase of stamps is the all-too-familiar a story of responsibility and control being detached from one another.

Worst of all is the fact that in the traditional system of local government roles are confused. Chief executives are not quite sure what their role is; chief officers are not quite sure about the difference between them and chief executives. What is probably most serious of all, councillors are not quite sure where they fit into the pattern.

Sadly for local government, there have been dramatic developments elsewhere in the public sector. There have been major changes in the Civil Service. Above all, the National Health Service has been at the forefront of change, in the overhaul of its management structures. However, those lessons have yet to filter through significantly to local government.

The model that I would urge upon the Government to consider for local government is the model that they adopted for the National Health Service, with its process of general management as a way forward. My experience and my belief is that the analysis brought to bear on the Health Service is absolutely right in the NHS and would be absolutely right in local government.

That takes us on to what needs to be done to develop more effective managers. First, it is necessary to establish a strong general management lead in the officer structure and then create strong and effective service managers in posts that really matter. The role of a general manager has to be made absolutely clear. A general manager is not a chief executive, nor is he a typical departmental head or chief officer in charge of an empire. General managers have to be free from service responsibility, they have to work across all services with meaningful control of all that goes on. They have to have the authority that chief executives often do not and more than anything else they have to get away from the idea that the job of general manager is somehow to chair in a mystic way a management team that all too often is composed of people who are invited to look across all services while having their own empires to defend.

The role of service managers also needs to be clearly understood. Service managers need to be free to deliver the services for which they are responsible. They need the authority and the control to do those jobs. They need their own budgets and they need to be able to decide how to spend them. They need their own cost centres and they need to be able to bid for their own resources.

It is never going to be possible to manage a service, be it in the public sector or elsewhere, without proper and effective control of the staff. The manager, not the personnel department, must do the hiring and firing. The manager, not the personnel department, must argue for the structures and suggest the grades. To manage effectively, a manager must have his own targets based on outputs which must be based on quality and not numerical factors. I have never been impressed on being told the number of times that a council cuts the grass in a year. I am much more interested in how long the grass is before they think it needs cutting. That is the targeting and control that they need.

In addition, local government needs to adopt an appropriate form of management. Local government is not a business. It cannot be run like Marks and Spencer for the simple reason that local government cannot withdraw from statutory functions, as a business can if it is making a loss. Councillors can never become line managers in the business sense. In their franker moments, councillors sometimes admit that they are unclear about their role, and that they seem to lack some of the skills that are needed. Therefore we have to identify a third manager in local government—the political manager. When we understand and work out that role, we shall get away from the conflict between councillors and officers and the complaint that all too often, councillors are officer-dominated.

Finally, one has to ask what is involved in managing services in a businesslike way. It is not possible to go into detail in such a brief debate, but certainly the customers must come first. That is the key to it all. Secondly, the central bureaucracy must be dismantled, and, thirdly, it must provide business budgets. Certainly there have to be incentives for managers. The authority that I used to lead now has a profit-sharing scheme for its DLO because the DLO makes so much profit.

A review of local government is not only a good idea but it is long overdue. Despite all the legislation, which I willingly support and believe to be necessary, as long as it is only legislation and not a major overhaul of local government services, we shall not secure the future of a flourishing local democracy in Britain.

My experience during 11 years in local government has taught me a number of things. If management is overhauled it gives councillors a much more satisfying role. It gives them greater control of authorities and, therefore, enhances democracy. My experience has also taught me that if management is overhauled better services are provided and more services are obtained from the same amount of money.

I learnt also that if the power of the centre, particularly the financial centre is ended—the lawyers have their own budget, and have to recover their own costs, and the planning department is free to use in-house lawyers or go down the street to a private firm of solicitors if it prefers —it saves a great deal of money because overheads will shrink. If one is careful, the money saved can be re-invested and given to the managers who deliver the services. The money that was spent on overheads can be spent on local people.

My hon. Friend the Minister may talk about all the things in which he used to be involved, such as competitive tendering. All the changes could make it easier for in-house people to win the contracts because they would be better managed and more cost-effective. My experience has also taught me that better-managed authorities mean jobs that are more secure and union support.

All those objectives have been achieved in one council that I know. I know that many other Members have similar experiences. We would all say that if the Government can encourage local government services to be better managed, and encourage officers and councillors to do their jobs in a better way, then, without passing another law, there will be better services, better democracy and a much more secure future for local government.

2.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on his stimulating speech about the management of local government services. He has shown, as he has on previous occasions, an insight into the problems based on knowledge and experience as the leader of Wansdyke council and as a member of that authority before he became the leader. I hope that his remarks will be widely read by members and officers in local government.

My hon. Friend's contribution gives me the opportunity to discuss the action that the Government have taken through the Local Government Act 1988 to try to bring about a new approach to management in local government. That was the essential purpose we had in mind when we planned the legislation on competition, which is now embodied in the first part of the 1988 Act.

My hon. Friend has described the action which a good and progressive Conservative-controlled authority was taking of its own accord, without needing the spur that the Act provides. But, alas, too few authorities have been prepared to take the long cool look at all management activities and structures which Wansdyke put in hand with such productive results. If we had waited for voluntary action to bring the kind of changes that were needed in local government generally, I fear we would have waited a long time.

The truth of that is proved clearly by the spate of activity that has accompanied the passage of the Act. Large numbers of advertisements appeared for managers to run competitive processes. There were innumerable articles on the challenge that lay ahead and how best to deal with it. Seminars and conferences were launched on every side—and did very good business. My hon. Friend and I have spoken at a number of those conferences.

All that suggests strongly that few authorities were in a position properly to define and describe the services they needed and the way in which they could best and most effectively be provided. Most have found their existing command and control quite inadequate to handle service delivery in a competitive environment. There was clearly a widespread fear that present cost levels were less than competitive. The kind of self-examination which we have seen in Wansdyke had few imitators.

All this made somewhat ironic the impassioned pleas that we heard from so many authorities and from the local authority associations, asking to be left alone to decide whether or not to go in for competition because they were in the best position to know whether their cost levels were such as to deliver the best value for the ratepayer's hard-earned money. They cannot have it both ways. If their service delivery was already so efficient, competition should have presented them with few problems. There would have been no need to question existing management structures, nor any need to consider whether to break loose from control service provision, nor any need to cast around for people capable of managing the provision of services.

Already we are seeing that substantial cost savings have been identified, bonus schemes are being drastically revised, the level of central overheads is being questioned, asset holdings are being pruned as spare capacity is identified and clear and simple organisational structures are being adopted in place of vague and informal ones. For example, a report published for Income Data Services, which came out last week, showed that increasing numbers of councils are merging all their direct service organisations into a single business unit so that they can compete more effectively with the private sector. This means new profit-sharing schemes, the encouragement of work force participation, of such methods as team briefings and quality circles, and new incentives for managers such as performance related pay. There is also a new and welcome move towards term-limited contract arrangements for senior staff.

All of this only confirms what the Government have believed all along—that any organisation that is left to run without outside pressures on its efficiency for any length of time is likely to fail increasingly to deliver real value for money. The Audit Commission's findings have repeatedly confirmed that this is a fact of life.

I can assure the House that, the Government see competition as a way of strengthening local government. Clear decision-making processes, full and regular information on cost levels and reductions in these cost levels can only work to the benefit of members, officers and ratepayers, and therefore of the local democratic process as a whole. That is why the legislation is specifically designed to strengthen the organisations in local government that are responsible for the actual provision of services—always assuming, of course, that they are capable of being strengthened in this way. What the Act says is that council employees can continue to provide direct services, but only if they can show—in fair and open competition—that they can win a tender in the face of counter bids from the private sector. If they are not capable of doing this, the ratepayer would be better served by whoever can win the contract on such terms.

The advantages of transparency in management and costing are guaranteed by the requirement that each of the services made subject to competition must be separately accounted for—with costs, including overheads, and revenues properly identified. We would expect most services as a rule to achieve the not unreasonable rate of return of 5 per cent. on capital—and we have required the auditor to comment on how far they are successful in this objective. We have also provided appropriate—and in some cases, I fear, all-too necessary—sanctions.

The savings that this revaluation in the management of local government offers are certainly very substantial indeed. The leader of Bristol city council has said publicly that savings of £600,000 have already been identified. Berkshire plans to save £800,000 a year just on school cleaning alone and Langbaurgh received a bid of £150,000 for street lighting which previously cost it £450,000. Those are just isolated examples. The Audit Commission, in its recent report on competitive tendering for parks and open spaces said that it had found, from its limited experience of tendering to date, that authorities could expect to achieve savings of between 10 and 30 per cent. on the previous price, with overall net savings of between 5 and 25 per cent. For parks and green spaces alone that could add up to savings of up to £200 million a year without any reduction in quality of service. That is just in the service area, which people might regard as relatively mundane—a total of £200 million a year.

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

The prize that we are looking for is, in every sense, worthwhile. The savings are not to be measured in money alone, although these are likely to be considerable, but in improved management, better cost structures, better motivated and better rewarded work forces. Where Wansdyke has pointed the way to what can be done, other councils should be following. That will result in better and more efficient services for the public.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 23 November 1988

NATIONAL FINANCE

Tax Returns

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the outcome of the pilot study into a wider issue of personal tax returns by the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Lamont: The pilot study, which took place during 1987 and 1988, was designed to test the Keith committee's suggestion that issuing personal tax returns to every employee known to the Inland Revenue would be effective in bringing to light previously unreported sources of income.

The findings suggest that a general issue of personal tax returns would not be an effective way of uncovering income which would not otherwise be taxed. In a very large majority of cases it would not bring to light any information affecting the taxpayer's liability and about 20 million taxpayers would be troubled unnecessarily. About 0·7 million—some half of them in the black economy—might be expected to disclose income which would not otherwise be taxed; the amounts disclosed would generally be small and the total tax yield from the issue of the returns might not be much more than the cost of issuing them and handling them when completed. The findings also suggest that about 0·7 million taxpayers might be expected to claim additional reliefs; the amounts claimed would generally be small and in some, or possibly most, cases no relief would be found to be due after the claim had been examined.

The Inland Revenue will continue to issue returns to all taxpayers who it thinks might pay too much or too little tax in the absence of a return. But whether or not a return has been issued, it is the obligation of all taxpayers to report any income they receive which has not been taxed, and the Inland Revenue will be taking steps to remind taxpayers of this obligation. In the light of the pilot study, however, it does not propose to send returns to employees more widely.

EC (Contributions)

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether, following Royal Assent to the European Communities (Finance) Bill on 15 November, the United Kingdom has yet made available its contribution under the 1988 intergovernmental agreement; and if he will make a statement about the granting of any further advance payments or overdraft facilities to the Community.

Mr. Brooke: The Government have today made a payment of £561,813,967·41 (851,644,560·25 ecu), representing eleven twelfths of the amount due from the United Kingdom under the 1988 intergovernmental agreement (IGA). The remaining instalment of £50,884,368·87 (77,422,232·75 ecu) will be paid on 1 December.

The Government have also made an advance payment of the non-VAT own resources which would otherwise have been made in December. The advance, under article 10(2) of regulation 2891/77, amounted to £158·4 million and it extinguished the Commission's outstanding overdraft with the United Kingdom under article 12(2) of the same regulation. The overdraft totalled £80·1 million. The balance of the advance was paid in the normal way from the Consolidated Fund under section 2(3) of the European Communities Act 1972.

The Commission requested the advance payment of December's non-VAT own resources because it is still experiencing cash flow problems. These will continue until all member states have paid their IGA contributions. Meanwhile, the Commission is asking non-payers to make available overdraft facilities under article 12(2) of regulation 2891/77; and is restricting its drawings from those who have paid the IGA to the amount which would otherwise have been available under article 12(2).

Article 10(2) and 12(2) facilities do not affect the total amount which the Community is authorised to spend during the year. Commission requests for advances or overdrafts do not, therefore, involve any addition to public expenditure.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Official Custodian for Charities

Mr. Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, in the light of the recommendations of the Woodfield report, he will make an announcement on the future of the official custodian for charities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: The role of the official custodian was reviewed by Sir Philip Woodfield as part of his efficiency scrutiny of the supervision of charities. Sir Philip questioned whether the official custodian's investment services were still needed. He recognised, however, that divesting the official custodian might be a complex and difficult job and that it might not be possible to dispense with his services altogether. He therefore recommended that the possibilities be studied in more detail by a firm of outside consultants.

The consultants' report set out a number of options including full divestment. I have carefully considered these options with the chief charity commissioner in the light of the continuing need to protect charity property and of the value of the official custodian's services, especially to small charities. My conclusion is that in line with the Woodfield report's emphasis on the need for trustees to take greater responsibility and consistent with the more active supervisory role which is envisaged for the commission, the continuance of the official custodian's investment services is no longer justified. The office of the official custodian will, however, be retained, and we have no plans to abolish his function in relation to charity land.

The Government will put forward more detailed proposals for divesting the official custodian in the White Paper due to be published early next year. In the meantime the Charity Commission will be considering, with interested parties, how divestment can best be achieved and how long it will take.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Agricultural and Food Research Council

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received the annual report of the Agricultural and Food Research Council for 1987-88; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The annual report of the Agricultural and Food Research Council for 1987-88 has been submitted to me under the requirements of the Science and Technology Act 1965, and a copy was laid before the House on 16 November.

I was most interested to study the report and, in a year of managerial and organisational change for the council, I was particularly encouraged to note:

i. the major advances in studying the control of genes and the behaviour and requirements of living plant and animal cells;

ii. research that could eventually lead to the development of new vaccines to protect animals against several diseases at once;

iii. the new developments that are emerging in the use of biological control systems against pests and the improvement of nitrogen usage;

iv. the novel findings that could indicate improved ways of improving food quality and stability.

Economic and Social Research Council

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received the annual report of the Economic and Social Research Council for 1987-88; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The annual report of the Economic and Social Research Council for 1987-88 has been submitted to me under the requirements of the Science and Technology Act 1965, and a copy is being laid before the House today.

I was most interested to study the report and, in an eventful and difficult year for the council, I was particularly encouraged to note:

(i) the publication of the Report on Horizons and Opportunities in the Social Sciences, setting new directions for Social Science research into the 1990s and confirming that British Social Science is outstandingly good in international terms over a range of disciplines;

(ii) the continued improvement in PhD thesis submission rates for students supported by the Council, in response to the firm application of sanctions and the encouragement given by the Council to improvements in doctoral research training;

(iii) the launch of important new research programmes on Countryside Change, Risk and Pollution; AIDS; New Technologies and the Firm; and Transport;

(iv) The streamlining of ESRC's organisational structure to provide a clearer framework for the setting of priorities, improved management of research, protection of curiosity-driven research funded through the Research Grants Scheme, and increased emphasis on the evaluation and dissemination of research output.

I congratulate the council on its achievements and look forward to further progress under the guidance of the new ESRC chairman.

ENVIRONMENT

Waste Disposal

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the additional consultation paper on waste disposal law amendments as announced on 29 June. *Official Report*, column *254*.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of the follow-up consultation paper which contains proposals from the Department and the Welsh Office to complement and strengthen those already announced on 29 June.

First, we propose to take powers to control imports and exports of waste. It remains our view that international trade in waste disposal services can be economically and environmentally desirable, provided that it is properly controlled and monitored. To ensure that this is so, we propose to take direct powers in primary legislation to prohibit, restrict or control the import or export of wastes. The powers, which would be exercised by regulations, would be desirable for example if trade in particular wastes were to risk damage to humans, animals, plants or the environment generally, were to affect the availability of disposal facilities or were to lead to improper disposal. Existing powers are contained in a range of primary legislation and regulations which the Government believe could usefully be clarified.

We propose to make certain additional changes to the provisions of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, so that the Secretary of State might add, through regulations, criteria which are relevant to the consideration of a licence application; so that an application may be considered if the applicant has obtained an established use certificate; and so that the Secretary of State might, through regulation, require licences to carry specified conditions.

We propose also to reduce the uncertainty at law about responsibility for the safety of closed landfill sites by giving clear responsibility for record keeping and monitoring of closed landfills to waste disposal authorities, where the expertise on waste disposal lies.

We propose to close the loophole under which scavenging at private sector sites is not an offence.

Finally, we propose additional measures to combat the growing problem of fly-tipping. We propose to make the registered keeper of a vehicle used in fly-tipping liable to prosecution unless he can demonstrate that he has taken reasonable steps to satisfy himself that the vehicle would not be used for such purposes.

Waste (Imports)

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further measures he proposes to take to control imports of waste.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It remains our view that international trade in waste disposal services can be economically and environmentally desirable, provided that it is properly controlled and monitored. We have, however, included in a consultation paper issued today, a proposal to take direct powers in primary legislation to prohibit, restrict or control the import or export of wastes. The powers, which would be exercised by regulations, would be desirable for example if trade in particular wastes were to risk damage to humans, animals, plants or the environment generally, were to affect the availability of disposal facilities or were to lead to improper disposal. Existing powers are contained in a range of primary legislation and regulations which the Government believe could usefully be clarified.

We have concluded that movement of waste for disposal across national frontiers should in general be restricted to wastes which are to go directly to specialist treatment plants or incinerators. Shipments of waste to go directly to landfill should be exceptional and permitted only with the agreement of the importing country. We also consider that all transfrontier movements of waste should be subject to the pre-notification procedures set out in the EC directive on transfrontier shipment of hazardous waste. We intend to put these proposals to our European colleagues at the forthcoming EC Environment Council with the aim of strengthening the existing directives.

Housing (East London)

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in his consideration of the potential for more housing in east London.

Mr. Trippier: As announced on 20 April, the Department carried out consultancy studies into the scope for housing development on five large areas of east London. The consultants have now reported. We are considering in the light of their findings what action the Government might take to facilitate housing development in the study areas. Copies of the consultants' report have been placed in the Library of the House.

Ozone Layer

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further action he intends to take internationally to protect the ozone layer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I propose to call a major international conference on the protection of the ozone layer early next year. It will be in London in March. The Prime Minister will participate. It will be held in association with the United Nations environment programme (UNEP) under whose auspices the Montreal protocol was successfully developed.

I shall be inviting Ministers from developed and developing countries, world industry and international organisations. I want the conference to demonstrate that industry has already developed, or soon will, new products and processess that will enable all countries quickly to reduce the use of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and move to a CFC free world.

The House is already aware that we are calling for worldwide emissions of CFCs to be reduced by at least 85 per cent., and as soon as possible. I was convinced of this urgent need by the latest scientific evidence. My noble Friend the Minister for Housing, Environment and Countryside will at the Environment Council this week be urging our European colleagues to make these reductions by the turn of the century and to agree that the Montreal protocol must be strengthened to this effect. This further action is essential not only to protect the ozone layer but because CFCs are powerful greenhouse gases which contribute to the risk of global warming and consequent climate change. The Montreal protocol will come into force on new year's day. Our conference in March will give a political boost to the important first meeting of the parties in Finland the following month with will begin the formal process of reviewing the protocol. I have told the executive director of UNEP that the United Kingdom would like to host the second meeting of the parties when we hope the reductions we are demanding will be agreed. This will be in April 1990.

It is not enough for the United Kingdom or even the European Community to take action on its own. A clear commitment is needed from all world governments, including those who have not yet signed the protocol, if we are to have any chance of preventing further damage to the ozone layer. It is not enough to set objectives. Our London conference must show how they will be achieved in practice.

WALES

Local Authorities (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will make known his plans for local authority capital expenditure for 1989-90.

Mr. Peter Walker: Following the autumn review of public expenditure I have decided to increase total gross provision for local authority spending in 1989-90 in Wales to £450 million. This is an increase of £34 million (8 per cent.) over 1988-89.

The increased provision allows for £10·3 million of allocations specifically to assist district councils to meet the capital costs of preparing for and implementing the community charge.

The largest percentage increase in provision goes to personal social services. This reflects the rising number of the elderly as well as the shift in the burden of care in the mental health services from the NHS to local authorities.

In further increasing the provision for education, I am recognising the need to improve the fabric of school buildings and also to invest in schools rationalisation projects which will release revenue resources for use elsewhere in the education service.

Local authorities are being notified today of their individual allocations on both housing and non-housing services including major road schemes (£39 million) and projects of regional or national importance and special projects (£12·5 million). The overall total for allocations is £337 million.

Details of the allocations for individual authorities have been placed in the Library. Allocations for schemes under the urban programme including urban development grant totalling £27 million will be announced shortly.

Child Abuse

Sir Raymond Gower: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he intends to make any arrangements to ensure that social work professionals in Wales receive appropriate training to deal effectively with cases of child abuse.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have given consideration to the implications for training following the Government's response to the Cleveland inquiry report, and in consultation with the Welsh Counties Committee. I have concluded that the best way forward for the financial year

1989-90 will be by means of a specific grant. Broadly in line with the position in England, a grant of 70 per cent. in support of expenditure of £588,000 will be made available to Welsh counties for use in training social work professionals and others in handling cases of child abuse. The money will be apportioned appropriately for each county, and will be allocated against detailed operational plans submitted to my Department for approval. The objectives and criteria for evaluation will be subject to discussion with local authority representatives, as will the arrangements for funding the scheme for the following financial year taking account of the need for continuity. Overall, this initiative will build on the steps that I have already taken for 1988-89. These involve a special initial allocation of over £60,000 for training in this field. Subject to parliamentary approval, this funding will continue for the financial year 1989-90.

TRANSPORT

Freightliner-Speedlink Merger

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he approved the recent merger of British Rail's subsidiary Freightliner with its Speedlink business; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State approved the merger of Freightliner with Speedlink which came into effect on 10 October.

The information of a single, non-bulk freight business will improve BR's performance by building on the strengths of the two organisations. It will also enable BR to make the best possible use of the opportunities presented by the opening of the Channel tunnel in 1993.

Although the new business will be a part of the railway and not a separate subsidiary, its performance will be clearly and separately identifiable in BR's report and accounts.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 24 November 1988

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Approvals Board for Telecommunications

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects the British Approvals Board for Telecommunications to be appointed as an approvals authority for meters.

Mr. Atkins: I am pleased to announce that, following statutory consultation and consideration of comments, my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has appointed BABT as an approvals body for meters comprised within the public telecommunications systems of British Telecommunications plc and Mercury Communications Ltd. This appointment is under section 25 of the Telecommunications Act 1984.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Nitrate Sensitive Zones

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals there are to compel farmers to restrict farming activities in nitrate sensitive zones and to compensate them for such restrictions.

Mr. MacGregor: The nitrate problem is a complex one and remedies may vary considerably from area to area depending on local circumstances such as geology, rainfall and farming patterns. In some cases, water blending or treatment may provide the best option for reducing nitrate levels—and indeed the only one in the short term. In other cases, agricultural restrictions may be preferable or a mixture of water and agricultural measures.

That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I commissioned a range of desk studies to examine the options for limiting nitrate concentrations in drinking water in ten varied localities. We hope to publish the results of those desk studies soon.

The Government believe that, wherever possible, any agricultural restrictions should in the first event be on a voluntary basis. They do, however, consider that it is necessary to retain compulsory powers to establish protection zones as a fallback. Provision for such zones is therefore included in the water privatisation Bill on a similar but more flexible basis than the provisions, which have so far never been used, contained in the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

The Government also believe that, where farmers are obliged to restrict their agricultural activities beyond the degree which could be regarded as good agricultural practice, they should be compensated. The details of these compensation arrangements are currently the subject of careful consideration, the conclusions of which will be announced during the passage of the Bill. Appropriate consultations will be held with water, farming and other affected interests. The Government will also be considering the extent to which compensation costs can be offset by reductions in CAP support.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teacher Training

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students were recruited to courses of initial teacher training in 1988.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: A survey undertaken by my Department shows that 20,183 students entered courses of initial teacher training in 1988, an increase of 1,003 over 1987, and an improvement of 3,294 over 1986. Recruitment to primary courses is 12 per cent. higher than last year, while intakes to secondary training are 97 per cent. of the very high levels achieved last year. Recruitment to the shortage subjects is higher than 1987 in CDT, business studies and modern languages, but lower in maths, physics and chemistry.

I am placing in the Library the principal results of the survey.

ENVIRONMENT

Charter of Local and Self-government

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many countries have now signed the European charter of local and self-government;

(2) whether Her Majesty's Government propose to sign the European charter of local and self-government; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what discussions he has had with representatives of local authorities about the European charter of local and self-government.

Mr. Ridley: I understand that 14 countries have signed the charter. We have no plans to sign it. The matter was last discussed in the presence of local authority representatives at the eighth conference of European Ministers responsible for local government which was held in Ireland in September.

CIVIL SERVICE

Travel

Mr. Knowles: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how much money is spent in a full year on official travel between *(a)* London and Paris, *(b)* London and Brussels and *(c)* London and Munich; which airlines are used, and at what level of fares; and if he has any plans to use cheaper fares now available.

Mr. Luce: The information is not held in the form requested and cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost. However, it is the OMCS policy that British carriers are the carrier of first choice where they offer best value for money but we seek always to use the most economic fare whenever possible.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Council of Ministers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council held on 21 and 22 November.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Foreign Affairs Council met in Brussels on 21 and 22 November. I attended on 21 November, accompanied by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. She attended on 22 November accompanied by the Minister for Trade.

The Council reached agreement on the four implementing regulations for the structural funds following the agreement at the Brussels European Council in February to double the funds by 1993. It also concluded the conciliation procedure with the European Parliament on the regulations for the European social fund and the agriculture guidance fund. Discussions on the Parliament's proposed changes to the horizontal and regional fund regulations will continue at official level with a view to securing a common Council position for the Parliament in time for the co-operation procedure to be completed and the regulations adopted at the December Foreign Affairs Council.

The Council discussed the preparation for the Rhodes European Council and agreed that the main subjects for discussion would be the further development of the Community, the EC's international role, and the environment. For the first item the main text will be the report by the Commission on progress in completing the single market, due to be submitted under article 8(b) of the Treaty of Rome as amended by the Single European Act.

The Council had an exchange of views on prospects for the mid-term meeting of the GATT Uruguay round in Montreal on 4-8 December. The Council noted the importance of the mid-term meeting for success in the round as a whole, and endorsed the Commission's proposals for a constructive approach to the meeting in Montreal. The recommendations from the Agriculture Council on 14-15 November on the handling of agriculture at the MTM, were confirmed.

There was discussion of possible ways forward in the dispute with the United States on the Community directive prohibiting the use of hormones in meat. This will be further discussed at the December FAC.

The Council agreed the Community's generalised scheme of preferences (GSP) for 1989. The GSP is an important element in the Community's relations with developing countries. It provides access to the Community market on concessional terms for a wide range of LDC products, on an autonomous basis.

The Commission introduced a report on the Community's textile and clothing industry which will be further discussed.

In the margins of the Council there was a successful meeting of the EC/Cyprus Association Council which underlined once again the close relations between the two sides. At the FAC itself progress was made on new financial protocols for Cyprus and Malta.

Meeting in the framework of European political co-operation, Ministers of the Twelve discussed the outcome of the Algiers meeting of the Palestinian National Council—which represented a modest step forward—and agreed a statement. Statements were also issued on recent developments in Afghanistan and on the occasion of Lebanese national day on 22 November. Copies of all three have been placed in the Library of the House.

EMPLOYMENT

Trade Union Rights Commissioner

Miss Widdicombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has appointed the Commissioner for the rights of trade union members.

Mr. Cope: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has appointed Mrs. Gill Rowlands as Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members, from 24 November 1988 to 24 November 1991.

HEALTH

Family Practitioner Committees

Mr Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in developing a leadership role in prescribing for family practitioner committees, as announced in "Promoting Better Health"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Early in 1989 we intend to launch a number of pilot projects designed to establish how family practitioner committees (FPCs) can most effectively discharge their new leadership role in promoting more effective and economic prescribing by general practitioners. Building on the experience gained in the pilot projects, we intend to issue guidance in about a year's time on best practice in this area for all FPCs to follow. To carry out this role—whether in the pilot projects in the first instance or more generally later—family practitioner committees will be given access to all levels of data from PACT, the new prescribing information system. A further important feature of the new arrangements will be the provision of FPCs of professional advice, independent of local GPs and their representative body the local medical committee, on interpretating the PACT data and on developing their activities in this field. FPCs will also wish to consult local medical committees who will have access to the PACT data about prescribing in their FPC area.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 25 November 1988

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Programme

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what money has been allocated to the United Kingdom aid programme to cover the cost of the United Kingdom contribution to the International Monetary Fund enhanced structural adjustment facility.

Mr. Chris Patten: Her Majesty's Government have agreed to provide up to £327 million for the IMF enhanced structural adjustment facility (ESAF) during the period up to 2002. Under the 1987 public expenditure survey the aid programme was credited with the following additional amounts in respect of United Kingdom contributions to the subsidy account of the IMF ESAF:

(i) 1988-89 £6·5 million (subsequently increased to £8·5 million by a claim on the Reserve of £2 million);
(ii) 1989-90 £13 million;
(iii) 1990-91 £20 million.

Under the latest public expenditure survey further additional provision has been made for £4 million (1989-90), £5·5 million (1990-91) and £13·5 million (1991-92). This fully covers the total estimated United Kingdom contributions to the subsidy account over the survey period.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what money has been allocated to the United Kingdom aid programme to cover the expected cost of Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer's debt initiative.

Mr. Chris Patten: It is impossible accurately to predict the cost of the Toronto concessions. This will depend on factors such as which countries reach agreement with the IMF and seek rescheduling from the Paris Club, the date at which they come to the club, creditors' decisions on eligibility for the concessions and which debts are to be rescheduled. It is planned to finance the interest reduction by an aid grant to the country concerned which will be paid directly by the Overseas Development Administration to ECGD. I expect these sums to be paid in each financial year following the year in which the costs are incurred. The amount added to the aid programme to cover these costs is £2·5 million in 1990-91 and £14 million in 1991-92. These figures are expected to build up quickly.

Hurricane Joan

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the aid provided to Nicaragua by Her Majesty's Government in response to damage caused by hurricane Joan; what additional aid requests have been received; what representations have been received urging more assistance; and what information sources he relies upon to provide details of hurricane damage.

Mr. Chris Patten: Including our contribution to the European Community's programme, we have provided £413,000 in emergency aid. This has been channelled through voluntary agencies largely to the Atlantic coast region. No specific further aid requests have been made although I have received a number of representations from groups and individuals in this country urging that further assistance be given. We use all available information sources on any disaster, including British diplomatic posts, voluntary agencies, international organisations and especially the office of the United Nations disaster relief co-ordinator.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if consideration has been given to sending military assistance from British forces based in Belize to aid the civilian authorities in Nicaragua with repair work arising from damage caused by hurricane Joan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: No request for the assistance of the British garrison in Belize has been received from the Government of Nicaragua.

Kurdish Refugees

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance has been offered to the Government of Turkey for the Iraqi Kurdish refugees; and how much has been accepted.

Mr. Chris Patten: We made a contribution of £250,000 to the Turkish Red Crescent earlier this month for its work in caring for these refugees. This contribution has been accepted with gratitude.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

City Technology Colleges

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he intends to issue any guidance on the admission criteria and procedures, especially relating to the use of interviews, that may be used in selecting pupils to attend city technology colleges.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Pupils admitted to CTCs will have demonstrated their aptitude to benefit from the particular type of education to be offered, will represent a wide range of abilities and, so far as practicable, a cross section of the community of the area in which the college is situated. It will be for CTCs themselves to decide how to give effect to these criteria in their admission arrangements, which may include the use of interviews.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) whether he has established or intends to establish any guidance or standard requirements regarding the curriculum to be taught in city technology colleges;

(2) in which respects it is anticipated that the curriculum laid down for a city technology college will differ or add to the requirements of the national curriculum; and which elements would be compulsory in the curriculum for students attending such city technology colleges beyond the age of 16 years.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: As a condition of grant CTCs will offer a curriculum which is broad and balanced with an emphasis on science and technology, including the applications of information technology across the curriculum. We shall expect the curriculum for all pupils in years one to five to cover all the core and foundation subjects of the national curriculum, national arrangements for assessments will apply, and provision will be made for the teaching of religious education and for collective worship. A wide range of courses will be available for post-16 pupils.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has established criteria or formulae for determining the levels of private and/or public funding that can be made available for the establishment of individual city technology colleges, either as revenue or capital.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The basis of our recurrent grant to CTCs will be an average of equivalent expenditure by local education authorities on maintained schools in similar areas. Capital costs will vary according to individual circumstances, including for example the cost of acquiring a site and whether any refurbishment or additional building works are needed. In each case sponsors will be required to make a significant contribution to those costs.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will issue guidance to local education authorities on the availability of lists of parents' names and addresses to parents of children in schools which are currently state schools but are considering opted out or city technology college status.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) gave her on Monday, 7 November at column *3*.

Under-Fives

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the latest figure for the percentage of under-fives in *(a)* nursery schools, *(b)* nursery classes and *(c)* primary classes, by local education authority, in England and Wales.

Mr. Jackson: The number of children under five attending maintained nursery schools, nursery classes and infant classes in primary schools as a percentage of the estimated three and four-year-old population in each local education authority in England in January 1988 is given in the following table. Figures for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Percentage of under fives in nursery and primary schools January 1988

	Nursery schools	*Nursery classes*	*Infant classes*
Barking	0·0	30·7	32·3
Barnet	6·7	22·9	24·6
Bexley	3·2	10·3	12·9
Brent	3·9	28·7	26·5
Bromley	0·0	1·9	14·3
Croydon	4·8	2·1	28·5
Ealing	6·7	27·2	27·0
Enfield	0·0	21·3	29·6
Haringey	4·6	35·5	27·9
Harrow	0·0	16·2	27·5
Havering	0·0	4·1	32·4
Hillingdon	2·0	44·4	3·3
Hounslow	0·0	68·6	0·6
Kingston upon Thames	7·6	23·2	23·3
Merton	0·0	39·2	19·5
Newham	14·5	43·3	1·5
Redbridge	0·0	10·1	14·2
Richmond upon Thames	1·8	15·4	27·3
Sutton	5·9	13·8	0·7
Waltham Forest	5·5	34·5	12·7
Inner London	7·2	30·9	12·9
Birmingham	8·1	24·4	32·5
Coventry	5·3	18·4	31·3
Dudley	5·4	27·0	14·6
Sandwell	2·6	43·8	32·5
Solihull	0·0	29·4	33·6
Walsall	11·1	46·2	33·8
Wolverhampton	12·8	45·2	14·2
Knowsley	0·0	38·2	31·1
Liverpool	4·6	45·0	33·4
St. Helens	1·4	29·1	31·5
Sefton	4·4	24·3	31·9
Wirral	3·0	15·8	31·3
Bolton	7·5	30·1	30·7
Bury	3·6	20·0	31·8
Manchester	4·4	53·6	16·7
Oldham	0·0	33·9	31·3
Rochdale	14·9	15·4	32·1
Salford	14·6	37·8	33·2
Stockport	10·5	4·4	30·0
Tameside	5·6	35·6	33·8
Trafford	0·0	14·3	7·5
Wigan	2·3	23·4	33·2
Barnsley	3·2	46·5	17·2
Doncaster	0·0	39·0	34·8
Rotherham	5·2	35·0	16·3
Sheffield	6·3	36·3	19·0
Bradford	3·5	32·7	18·7
Calderdale	1·8	25·8	33·7
Kirklees	6·3	33·2	19·1
Leeds	1·5	32·7	21·8
Wakefield	5·8	41·5	22·3
Gateshead	1·0	33·3	30·6
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	8·9	31·0	29·8
North Tyneside	6·2	46·1	31·4
South Tyneside	18·8	32·3	31·7
Sunderland	11·4	24·0	32·0
Avon	6·3	8·8	30·9
Bedfordshire	8·9	21·1	5·3
Berkshire	10·0	14·4	1·2
Buckinghamshire	3·0	9·1	5·7
Cambridgeshire	3·9	7·9	29·4
Cheshire	3·5	17·4	32·0
Cleveland	1·0	52·7	19·3
Cornwall[1]	1·0	13·1	30·1
Cumbria	6·6	14·6	33·2
Derbyshire	5·4	23·0	24·8
Devon	1·1	8·7	15·7
Dorset	0·0	6·0	29·0
Durham	16·6	22·1	29·1
East Sussex	2·0	5·0	30·0
Essex	0·7	5·2	14·7
Gloucestershire	0·0	0·0	31·4
Hampshire	0·7	4·3	15·2
Hereford and Worcester	0·0	6·1	9·6
Hertfordshire	6·9	22·8	17·6
Humberside	4·5	28·4	19·9
Isle of Wight	0·0	5·6	34·1
Kent	0·2	4·9	6·6
Lancashire	9·4	7·6	31·3

	Nursery schools	*Nursery classes*	*Infant classes*
Leicestershire	0·2	21·4	14·6
Lincolnshire	2·2	5·3	20·1
Norfolk	2·4	2·8	25·0
North Yorkshire	2·0	15·9	25·7
Northamptonshire	3·6	14·0	32·9
Northumberland	1·8	24·4	28·9
Nottinghamshire	2·3	4·9	7·3
Oxfordshire	3·4	9·3	3·7
Shropshire	1·7	9·8	21·8
Somerset	0·0	0·8	32·1
Staffordshire	7·0	15·5	21·5
Suffolk	0·6	13·6	14·3
Surrey	1·8	9·6	11·9
Warwickshire	6·5	11·2	32·5
West Sussex	2·9	0·6	4·7
Wiltshire	0·0	2·1	16·1
England	4·2	19·7	20·9

[1] Includes Isles of Scilly.

Schools (Expenditure)

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average per capita expenditure for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary pupils, by local education authority, in England and Wales.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to "The Handbook of Education Unit Costs 1985-86"; a copy of which is in the Library. Table 4 provides the latest data on local education authorities in England. Data for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Class Sizes

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the latest figures for average class sizes in *(a)* primary, *(b)* secondary and *(c)* nursery schools, by location education authority, in England and Wales.

Mr. Jackson: Information on the average size of classes in nursery schools is not collected centrally. The average class size in maintained primary and secondary schools in each local education authority in England in January 1988 is given in the following table: The analyses relate to classes taught by one teacher during a selected period the day the schools census is carried out and do not necessarily represent the pattern of classes over the academic year as a whole. Information for Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Average class sizes in maintained primary and secondary schools January 1988

	Primary average size	*Secondary average size*
Barking	23·0	18·7
Barnet	23·5	17·9
Bexley	26·0	20·9
Brent	23·5	16·3
Bromley	26·1	19·9
Croydon	25·3	19·6
Ealing	23·7	18·6
[illegible]field	26·4	20·6
Haringey	22·7	16·9
Harrow	25·8	21·0
Havering	25·6	19·5
Hillingdon	25·1	20·0
Hounslow	23·9	19·8
Kingston upon Thames	25·2	18·9
Merton	25·3	20·5
Newham	25·5	19·9
Redbridge	28·1	19·6
Richmond upon Thames	25·3	20·8
Sutton	26·2	20·0
Waltham Forest	25·0	18·0
Inner London	22·3	19·0
Birmingham	27·3	21·1
Coventry	25·9	20·9
Dudley	25·6	18·8
Sandwell	25·7	19·2
Solihull	26·4	20·3
Walsall	23·8	18·3
Wolverhampton	23·1	18·8
Knowsley	24·9	19·1
Liverpool	24·2	19·5
St. Helens	25·9	18·3
Sefton	26·3	20·2
Wirral	24·7	19·9
Bolton	27·1	19·6
Bury	25·2	20·2
Manchester	25·4	18·7
Oldham	26·8	20·2
Rochdale	26·7	18·6
Salford	24·7	18·5
Stockport	26·5	19·9
Tameside	26·7	20·3
Trafford	25·7	19·1
Wigan	26·0	18·6
Barnsley	24·4	19·4
Doncaster	25·0	20·1
Rotherham	24·5	19·6
Sheffield	23·6	19·0
Bradford	25·0	20·5
Calderdale	25·7	19·5
Kirklees	25·1	19·5
Leeds	25·8	19·1
Wakefield	25·3	19·2
Gateshead	23·9	19·4
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	24·6	18·2
North Tyneside	20·9	17·9
South Tyneside	23·5	18·0
Sunderland	24·7	19·7
Isles of Scilly	15·0	18·4
Avon	27·3	20·9
Bedfordshire	25·6	21·0
Berkshire	26·2	19·8
Buckinghamshire	27·2	20·3
Cambridgeshire	26·7	20·7
Cheshire	27·3	20·2
Cleveland	25·4	19·3
Cornwall	26·0	20·1
Cumbria	24·1	18·9
Derbyshire	25·0	19·9
Devon	25·9	21·2
Dorset	26·8	20·8
Durham	25·4	20·3
East Sussex	25·8	20·0
Essex	26·1	20·9
Gloucestershire	25·8	20·1
Hampshire	26·0	20·5
Hereford and Worcester	25·7	20·6
Hertfordshire	24·9	19·1
Humberside	25·1	19·6
Isle of Wight	26·0	20·7

	Primary average size	*Secondary average size*
Kent	27·0	20·4
Lancashire	26·7	20·2
Leicestershire	25·5	19·7
Lincolnshire	26·2	20·3
Norfolk	24·9	20·0
North Yorkshire	24·3	20·2
Northamptonshire	25·8	20·5
Northumberland	26·0	20·3
Nottinghamshire	24·8	19·2
Oxfordshire	26·2	20·5
Shropshire	24·2	19·3
Somerset	26·8	20·7
Staffordshire	25·4	20·6
Suffolk	24·6	21·1
Surrey	24·6	19·2
Warwickshire	25·5	20·0
West Sussex	26·1	20·5
Wiltshire	25·2	20·8
England	25·4	19·9

Recruitment

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers recruited in Ireland in the past year to cover vacancies in London, have been given Department of Education and Science registration; how many have not; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the form requested. Between 1 October 1987 and 30 September 1988, 327 applications for qualified teacher status were considered under paragraph 2(b) of schedule 5 to the Education (Teachers) Regulations 1982 (SI 1982/106) in respect of teachers who had trained in the Republic of Ireland. To be approved under this provision, the course of training must be comparable in terms of length, content and depth of study to one available in England and Wales at the same time. Thirteen of these applications were accepted.

In addition, during the same period, ILEA recommended six teachers with qualifications obtained in the Republic of Ireland for qualified teacher status under paragraph 2(e) of schedule 5. All of these cases were accepted.

ILEA

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what levels of funding from central Government will be available to inner London authorities following their assumption of education responsibility when the Inner London Education Authority is abolished.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In 1990-91 a fixed total of central Government grant will be made available for distribution among local authorities. Each authority's entitlement will be determined by the Government's assessment of its need to spend on all services including education. Specific grant funding will also be available from a number of Government Departments.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what actions he intends to take to ensure the adequate funding of non-statutory education in inner London after the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In the annual grant-related expenditure assessment the Government take account of each local education authority's need to spend on various statutory and non-statutory aspects of provision. It is however for each LEA to determine its budget in accordance with its own priorities and the resources available to it. The same will apply to inner London boroughs when they become education authorities.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the amount paid by each local authority in England and Wales in the years 1986-87, 1987-88 and a best estimate for 1988-89, to all institutes of advanced, further and higher education; on what basis in the future such institutions will receive the £8,000 minimum withdrawn from the rate support grant, as detailed in his Department's consultation paper dated 11 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: In each of the years specified the net recurrent costs of advanced further education (AFE) have been shared between local education authorities (LEAs) by means of a capped pooling arrangement. My right hon. Friend is empowered to determine the size of the pool and, in the light of the advice of the national advisory body for public sector higher education (NAB), the distribution of the pool between local education authorities in respect of the polytechnics and colleges which they maintain or assist. A full list of the allocations determined by my right hon. Friend for the years 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89 is set out in the table. LEAs may pass onto their colleges amounts below or in excess of the allocations but information about precise payments to each institution is not available.

Under the provisions of the Education Reform Act 1988 the 29 English polytechnics and 32 other colleges maintained or assisted by LEAs will transfer from local authority control and from 1 April 1989 will become the funding responsibility of central Government which will channel grants to the sector through the new Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC). The council will be responsible for allocating the funds made available by my right hon. Friend.

Allocation of AFE capped pool (inclusive of catering and residence) by LEA institution

1986-87	*£ million*
Barking	
North East London Poly.	15·226
Barking COT	0·099
Total	15·325
Barnet	
Middlesex Poly.	[3]17·726
Barnet College	0·211
Total	17·937
Bexley	
Rose Bruford	0·544
Erith COT	0·461
Total	1·005
Brent	
Kilburn Poly.	0·179
Willesden COT	1·092
Total	1·271
Bromley	
Bromley COT	1·124
Ravensbourne C/A and D	1·238
Total	2·362
Croydon	
Croydon College	2·633

1986-87	*£ million*
Ealing	
Ealing CHE	5·482
Residuals	0·896
Total	6·378
Enfield	
Residuals	0·261
Haringey	
Tottenham COT	0·776
Harrow	
Harrow CHE	2·315
Havering	
Havering Tech.	0·466
Hillingdon	
No AFE provision	
Hounslow	
West London IHE	4·779
Hounslow Borough College	0·110
Total	4·889
Kingston on Thames	
Kingston Poly.	15·156
Kingston CFE	0·585
Total	15·741
Merton	
Merton Tech.	0·280
Wimbledon Sch./ART	0·719
Total	0·999
Newham	
East Ham COT	1·052
Redbridge	
Redbridge Tech.	0·007
Richmond on Thames	
Richmond/Thames College	0·555
Sutton	
No AFE provision	
Waltham Forest	
Waltham Forest College	0·293
Birmingham	
Birmingham Poly.	14·948
Birmingham C/F & D	0·759
Matthew Boulton	0·681
Residuals	0·354
Total	16·742
Coventry	
Coventry Poly.	15·921
Coventry Tech.	0·839
Residuals	0·271
Total	17·031
Dudley	
Residuals	0·763
Sandwell	
Warley COT	0·340
West Bromwich College	1·369
Total	1·709
Solihull	
Solihull COT	0·070
Walsall	
West Midlands CHE	1·551
Walsall COT	0·248
Total	1·799
Wolverhampton	
Wolverhampton Poly.	13·598
Wulfrun CFE	0·147
Total	13·745
Knowsley	
No AFE provision	
Liverpool	
Liverpool Poly.	20·175
Residuals	1·515
Total	21·690
St. Helens	
St. Helens COT	0·542
Sefton	
Hugh Baird CFE	0·048
Wirral	
Wirral MET College	0·732
Bolton	
Bolton IHE	4·744
Bolton MET College	0·105
Total	4·849
Bury	
Bury CFE	0·020
Manchester	
Manchester Poly.	27·090
Royal Northern C/Music	1·948
Residuals	1·402
Total	30·440
Oldham	
Oldham COT	0·548
Rochdale	
Rochdale Tech.	0·040
Salford	
Salford COT	3·611
Stockport	
Stockport COT	2·115
Tameside	
Tameside COT	0·109
Trafford	
Residuals	0·327
Wigan	
Wigan COT	0·973
Leigh Tech.	0·162
Total	1·135
Barnsley	
Barnsley COT	0·378
Doncaster	
Doncaster MET IHE	1·945
Rotherham	
Residuals	0·341
Sheffield	
Sheffield City Poly.	22·562
Residuals	1·047
Total	23·609
Bradford	
Bradford and Ilkley	3·090
Keighley Tech.	0·139
Total	3·229
Calderdale	
Percival Whitley CFE	0·072
Kirklees	
Huddersfield Poly.	12·315
Residuals	0·411
Total	12·726
Leeds	
Leeds Poly.	16·703
Residuals	0·988
Total	17·691
Wakefield	
Bretton Hall	2·113
Wakefield MET DIST	0·427
Total	2·540
Gateshead	
Gateshead Tech.	0·379
Newcastle/Tyne	
Newcastle Poly.	18·318
Newcastle C/A & T	0·844
Total	19·162
North Tyneside	
North Tyneside CFE	0·027
South Tyneside	
South Tyneside College	1·335
Sunderland	
Sunderland Poly.	11·223
Residuals	0·206
Total	11·429
ILEA	
Poly. of North London	11·732
Poly. of South Bank	17·128
City of London Poly.	10·008
Poly/Central London	14·055
Thames Poly.	12·516
The London Institute	8·676
Paddington College	1·015
South West London College	1·762
Garnett College	1·691
South East London College	0·708
Hammersmith/West London	0·986

1986-87	*£ million*
Westminster College	0·788
Cent S/Speech and Drama	0·656
Residuals	2·712
Total	84·433
Avon	
Bristol Poly.	16·453
Bath CHE	2·880
Residuals	0·911
Total	20·244
Bedfordshire	
Bedford CHE	2·067
Luton CHE	2·215
Dunstable College	0·251
Total	4·533
Berkshire	
Slough CHE	3·456
Bulmershe CHE	2·431
Reading COT	1·416
Residuals	0·576
Total	7·879
Buckinghamshire	
Buckinghamshire CHE	2·626
Residuals	0·307
Total	2·933
Cambridgeshire	
Cambridgeshire C/A & T	3·173
Residuals	0·661
Total	3·834
Cheshire	
Crewe & Alsager CHE	4·639
North Cheshire College	0·957
Residuals	0·877
Total	6·473
Cleveland	
Teesside Poly.	10·014
Residuals	0·584
Total	10·598
Cornwall	
Camborne Sch/MINES	0·908
Cornwall Tech.	0·814
Falmouth Sch/ART	0·332
Total	2·054
Cumbria	
Charlotte Mason	0·835
Residuals	1·078
Total	1·913
Derbyshire	
Derby CHE	5·997
Residuals	0·707
Total	6·704
Devon	
Plymouth Poly	12·453
Rolle College	1·629
Exeter C/A & D	0·742
Dartington C/Art	0·747
Residuals	2·034
Total	17·605
Dorset	
Dorset IHE	5·473
Bournemouth and Poole CFE	0·111
Bournemouth and Poole C/A & D	0·747
Total	6·331
Durham	
New College Durham	1·723
Residuals	0·451
Total	2·174
East Sussex	
Brighton Poly.	14·465
Brighton COT	0·838
Residuals	0·208
Total	15·511
Essex	
Essex IHE	5·177
Colchester IHE	1·251
Writtle Agricultural	0·640
Residuals	1·185
Total	8·253

1986-87	*£ million*
Gloucestershire	
Gloucester C/A & T	4·122
Residuals	0·134
Total	4·256
Hampshire	
Portsmouth Poly.	16·478
South Hants Arts	1·314
Southampton IHE	5·617
Farnborough COT	1·806
Highbury COT	1·233
Residuals	0·353
Total	26·801
Hereford and Worcester	
Worcester CHE	2·500
Worcester Tech.	0·452
Residuals	0·839
Total	3·791
Hertfordshire	
The Hatfield Poly.	11·877
Hertfordshire CHE	1·325
Watford College	1·118
Residuals	1·684
Total	16·004
Humberside	
Humberside College	7·801
Residuals	0·310
Total	8·111
Isle of Wight	
Isle of Wight C/Art	0·088
Kent	
Mid Kent CHFE	2·055
Kent C/Careers	0·134
Canterbury C/Art	0·814
Maidstone C/Art	0·669
Nonington College	0·202
Residuals	1·431
Total	5·305
Lancashire	
Lancashire Poly	12·485
Edge Hill CHE	3·773
Blackburn C/T & D	0·856
Blackpool and Fylde	1·390
Residuals	0·852
Total	19·356
Leicestershire	
Leicester Poly	18·106
Loughborough C/A & D	1·055
Residuals	0·542
Total	19·705
Lincolnshire	
Residuals	0·781
Norfolk	
Norwich City College	2·091
Norwich Sch./Art	0·619
Residuals	0·217
Total	2·927
North Yorkshire	
North Riding C/ED	1·124
York C/A & T	0·572
Askham Bryan C/AG	0·272
Residuals	0·010
Total	1·978
Northamptonshire	
Nene College	3·905
Residuals	0·108
Total	4·013
Northumberland	
Northumberland COT	0·248
Nottinghamshire	
Trent Poly.	20·388
Residuals	0·591
Total	20·979
Oxfordshire	
Oxford Poly.	11·509
Residuals	0·370
Total	11.879
Shropshire	
Residuals	0·320

1986-87	*£ million*
Somerset	
Residuals	0·895
Staffordshire	
North Staffs Poly.	12·993
Cauldon CFE	0·534
Stafford CFE	0·244
Residuals	0·255
Total	14·026
Suffolk	
Suffolk CFHE	1·571
Residuals	0·105
Total	1·676
Surrey	
West Surrey C/A & D	1·507
N.E. Surrey C/A & T	1·799
Guildford COT	0·930
Residuals	0·547
Total	4·783
Warwickshire	
Residuals	0·334
West Sussex	
West Sussex IHE	1·213
Residuals	1·356
Total	2·569
Wiltshire	
The College Swindon	0·799
Residuals	0·713
Total	1·512
Sutton	
No AFE Provision	
Waltham Forest	
Waltham Forest College	0·29500
Birmingham	
Birmingham Poly.	16·09700
Birmingham C/F & D	0·91700
Matthew Boulton	0·68200
Residuals	0·33600
Total	18·03200
Coventry	
Coventry Poly.	17.42240
Coventry Tech.	0·87800
Residuals	0·29100
Total	18·59140
Dudley	
Residuals	0·72600
Sandwell	
Sandwell College	1·67400
Solihull	
Solihull COT	0·07000
Walsall	
West Midlands CHE	1·55300
Walsall COT	0·23500
Total	1,78800
Wolverhampton	
Wolverhampton Poly.	14·57700
Wulfrun CFE	0·14000
Total	14·71700
Knowsley	
No AFE Provision	
Liverpool	
Liverpool Poly.	21·83600
Residuals	1·45100
Total	23·28700
St. Helens	
St. Helens COT	0·57500
Sefton	
Hugh Baird CFE	0·04500
Wirral	
Wirral MET College	0·76200
Bolton	
Bolton IHE	5·54000
Bolton MET College	0·10000
Total	5.64000
Bury	
Bury CFE	0·01900
Manchester	
Manchester Poly.	30·01830
Royal Northern C/Music	2·04500
Residuals	1·33200
Total	33·39530
Oldham	
Oldham COT	0·59900

1987-88	*£ million*
Barking	
North East London Poly.	16·02950
Barking COT	0·09400
Total	16·12350
Barnet	
Middlesex Poly.	19·18870
Barnet College	0·10400
Total	19·29270
Bexley	
Rose Bruford	0·61500
Erith COT	0·43800
Total	1·05300
Brent	
Kilburn Poly.	0·17000
Willesden COT	1·18750
Total	1·35750
Bromley	
Bromley COT	1·15100
Ravensbourne C/A and D	1·27800
Total	2·42900
Croydon	
Croydon College	2·74200
Ealing	
Ealing CHE	6·16600
Residuals	0·87300
Total	7·03900
Enfield	
Residuals	0·26600
Haringey	
Tottenham COT	0·77200
Harrow	
Harrow CHE	2·28800
Havering	
Havering Tech.	0·45900
Hillingdon	
No AFE provision	
Hounslow	
West London THE	4·92800
Hounslow Borough College	0·12800
Total	5·05600
Kingston on Thames	
Kingston Poly.	16·97235
Kingston CFE	0·55600
Total	17·52835
Merton	
Wimbledon Sch./ART	0·71700
Merton Tech.	0·32300
Total	1·04000
Newham	
East Ham COT	1·23050
Redbridge	
Redbridge Tech.	0·00000
Richmond on Thames	
Richmond/Thames College	0·52700
ILEA	
Poly. of North London	13·32200
Poly. of South Bank	19·42175
City of London Poly.	11·11915
Poly./Central London	14·51700
Thames Poly.	14·44800
The London Institute	9·30800
Paddington College	1·91400
SW London College	1·86300
Garnett College	1·79500
SE London College	0·69900
Hammersmith/W London	0·95800
Westminster College	0·80100
Residuals	2·54200
Total	92·70790

1987-88	*£ million*
Avon	
Bristol Poly.	18·29415
Bath CHE	3·29800
Residuals	1·00300
Total	22·59515
Bedfordshire	
Bedford CHE	2·18615
Luton CHE	2·59600
Total	4·78215
Berkshire	
Slough CHE	3·70860
Bulmershe CHE	2·74000
Reading COT	1·47900
Residuals	0·56600
Total	8·49360
Buckinghamshire	
Buckinghamshire CHE	2·77900
Residuals	0·29200
Total	3·07100
Cambridgeshire	
Cambridgeshire C/A & T	3·49350
Residuals	0·68700
Total	4·18050
Cheshire	
Crewe & Alsager CHE	5·32590
N Cheshire College	1·00000
Residuals	0·92300
Total	7·24890
Cleveland	
Teesside Poly.	10·89750
Residuals	0·56800
Total	11·46550
Cornwall	
Falmouth Sch./ART	0·90000
Cornwall Tech	0·34400
Camborne Sch./Mines	0·94800
Total	2·19200
Cumbria	
Charlotte Mason	1·08270
Residuals	1·19700
Total	2·27970
Derbyshire	
Derby CHE	6·40900
Residuals	0·67200
Total	7·08100
Rochdale	
Rochdale Tech.	0·03800
Salford	
Salford COT	3·84500
Stockport	
Stockport COT	2·05600
Tameside	
Tameside COT	0·10700
Trafford	
Residuals	0·32700
Wigan	
Residuals	1·12000
Barnsley	
Barnsley COT	0·35900
Doncaster	
Doncaster MET IHE	1·90900
Rotherham	
Residuals	0·32500
Sheffield	
Sheffield City Poly.	24·78715
Residuals	0·99500
Total	25·78215
Bradford	
Bradford and Ilkley	3·19200
Keighley Tech.	0·13200
Total	3·32400
Calderdale	
Percival Whitley CFE	0·06800
Kirklees	
Huddersfield Poly.	13·62150
Residuals	0·45100
Total	14·07250
Leeds	
Leeds Poly.	18·10730
Residuals	0·93800
Total	19·04530
Wakefield	
Bretton Hall	2·38800
Wakefield MET Dist.	0·41000
Total	2·79800
Gateshead	
Gateshead Tech.	0·36000
Newcastle/Tyne	
Newcastle Poly.	20·20365
Newcastle C/A&T	0·97100
Total	21·17465
North Tyneside	
North Tyneside CFE	0·02600
South Tyneside	
South Tyneside College	1·28500
Sunderland	
Sunderland Poly.	12·41585
Residuals	0·19600
Total	12·61185
Devon	
Plymouth Poly.	13·85050
Exeter C/A & D	0·72800
Dartington C/Art	0·84800
Rolle College	1·92300
Residuals	2·11000
Total	19·45950
Dorset	
Dorset IHE	6·29800
Bournemouth and Poole C/A & D	0·71000
Bournemouth and Poole CFE	0·10500
Total	7·11300
Durham	
New College Durham	1·71200
Residuals	0·42900
Total	2·14100
East Sussex	
Brighton Poly.	15·44050
Brighton COT	0·83000
Residuals	0·24100
Total	16·51150
Essex	
Essex IHE	5·64330
Writtle Agricultural	0·71200
Colchester IHE	1·29300
Residuals	1·20600
Total	8·85430
Gloucestershire	
Gloucester C/A & T	4·27700
Residuals	0·12900
Total	4·40600
Hampshire	
Portsmouth Poly.	17·85730
South Hants Arts	1·29100
Farnborough COT	1·89200
Southampton IHE	6·20900
Highbury COT	1·33700
Residuals	0·41900
Total	29·00530
Hereford and Worcester	
Worcester CHE	3·04950
Residuals	1·22700
Total	4·27650
Hertfordshire	
The Hatfield Poly.	14·93190
Watford College	1·21700
Residuals	1·715·00
Total	17·86390
Humberside	
Humberside College	8·59100
Residuals	0·29500
Total	8·88600
Isle of Wight	
Isle of Wight C/Art	0·09800
Kent	
Kent Art Institute	2·11400

1987-88	*£ million*
Mid Kent CHFE	1·96500
Kent C/Careers	0·12700
Nonington College	0·0000
Residuals	0·73900
Total	4·94500
Lancashire	
Lancashire Poly.	13·81350
Edge Hill CHE	4·11085
Blackburn C/T and D	0·84600
Blackpool and Fylde	1·70100
Residuals	0·73500
Total	21·20635
Leicestershire	
Leicester Poly.	18·84100
Loughborough C/A and D	1·05800
Residuals	0·51500
Total	20·41400
Lincolnshire	
Residuals	0·75500
Norfolk	
Norfolk Art	0·70700
Norwich City College	2·16400
Residuals	0·09300
Total	2·96400
North Yorkshire	
Askham Bryan C/AG	0·32500
North Riding C/ED	1·33600
York C/A and T	0·56300
Residuals	0·00400
Total	2·22800
Northamptonshire	
Nene College	4·44100
Residuals	0·10200
Total	4·54300
Northumberland	
Northumberland COT	0·23600
Nottinghamshire	
Trent Poly.	22·78450
Residuals	0·56200
Total	23·3460
Oxfordshire	
Oxford Poly.	12·85150
Residuals	0·35200
Total	13·20350
Shropshire	
Residuals	0·31400
Somerset	
Residuals	0·85800
Staffordshire	
North Staffs Poly.	14·53700
Cauldon CFE	0·54100
Residuals	0·51500
Total	15·59300
Suffolk	
Suffolk CFHE	1·49200
Residuals	0·13200
Total	1·62400
Surrey	
North East Surrey C/A and T	1·78030
West Surrey C/A and t	1·53700
Guildford COT	0·94960
Residuals	0·949608000
Total	4·84690
Warwickshire	
Residuals	0·31700
West Sussex	
West Sussex IHE	1·42110
Residuals	1·35400
Total	2·77510
Wiltshire	
The College Swindon	0·79100
Residuals	0·77400
Total	1·56500

1988-89	*£ million*
Barking	
North East London Poly.	17·09882
Barking COT	0·08900
Total	17·18782
Barnet	
Middlesex Poly.	20·81630
Barnet College	0·09900
Total	20·91530
Bexley	
Rose Bruford	0·71500
Erith COT	0·41600
Total	1·13100
Brent	
Kilburn Poly.	0·16300
Willesden COT	1·09000
Total	1·25300
Bromley	
Bromley COT	1·13400
Ravensbourne C/A and D	1·35500
Total	2·48900
Croydon	
Croydon College	2·76600
Ealing	
Ealing CHE	7·01200
Residuals	0·83000
Total	7·84200
Enfield	
Residuals	0·31200
Haringey	
Tottenham COT	0·77900
Harrow	
Harrow CHE	2·42500
Havering	
Havering Tech.	0·47300
Hillingdon	
No AFE provision	
Hounslow	
West London IHE	5·47200
Hounslow Boro College	0·14900
Total	5·62100
Kingston/Thames	
Kingston Poly.	19·18664
Kingston CFE	0·52800
Total	19·71464
Merton	
Wimbledon Sch/ART	0·76800
Merton Tech.	0·30600
Total	1·07400
Newham	
Newham Comm College	1·21391
Redbridge	
Redbridge Tech.	0·00000
Richmond/Thames	
Richmond/Thames College	0·37300
Sutton	
No AFE provision	
Waltham Forest	
Waltham Forest College	0·28000
Birmingham	
Birmingham Poly.	18·31964
Birmingham C/F and D	0·94300
Matthew Boulton	0·71900
Residuals	0·19300
Total	20·17464
Coventry	
Coventry Poly.	19·40459
Coventry Tech.	0·96700
Residuals	0·30800
Total	20·67959
Dudley	
Residuals	0·70700
Sandwell	
Sandwell College	1·60700
Solihull	
Solihull COT	0·06700
Walsall	
West Midlands CHE	1·48400

1988-89	*£ million*
Walsall COT	0·22400
Total	1·70800
Wolverhampton	
Wolverhampton Poly.	16·34798
Wulfrun CFE	0·13300
Total	16·48098
Knowsley	
No AFE provision	
Liverpool	
Liverpool Poly.	23·92772
Residuals	1·32600
Total	25·25372
St. Helens	
St. Helens COT	0·60200
Sefton	
Hugh Baird CFE	0·04300
Wirral	
Wirral MET College	0·73000
Bolton	
Bolton IHE	6·29232
Bolton MET College	0·09500
Total	6·38732
Bury	
Bury CFE	0·00700
Manchester	
Manchester Poly.	32·98619
Royal Northern C/Music	2·21900
Residuals	1·26700
Total	36·47219
Oldham	
Oldham COT	0·60800
Rochdale	
Rochdale Tech.	0·01400
Salford	
Salford COT	4·07798
Stockport	
Stockport COT	2·06766
Tameside	
Tameside COT	0·11000
Trafford	
Residuals	0·31100
Wigan	
Residuals	1·07900
Barnsley	
Barnsley COT	0·34100
Doncaster	
Doncaster MET IHE	1·88400
Rotherham	
Residuals	0·30900
Sheffield	
Sheffield City Poly.	27·14021
Residuals	0·94700
Total	28·08721
Bradford	
Bradford and Ilkley	3·28900
Keighley Tech.	0·04800
Total	3·33700
Calderdale	
Percival Whitley CFE	0·02500
Kirklees	
Huddersfield Poly.	14·83194
Residuals	0·49600
Total	15·32794
Leeds	
Leeds Poly.	20·03038
Residuals	0·89300
Total	20·92338
Wakefield	
Bretton Hall	2·77200
Wakefield MET District	0·39000
Total	3·16200
Gateshead	
Gateshead Tech.	0·34200
Newcastle upon Tyne	
Newcastle Poly.	22·00132
Newcastle C/A and T	1·04000
Total	23·04132
North Tyneside	
North Tyneside CFE	0·02500
South Tyneside	
South Tyneside College	1·26300
Sunderland	
Sunderland Poly.	13·63404
Residuals	0·21200
Total	13·84604
ILEA	
Poly. of North London	15·25775
Poly. of South Bank	21·30932
City of London Poly.	12·30430
Poly./Central London	16·37577
Thames Poly.	18·46523
The London Institute	9·83500
Paddington College	1·82100
South West London College	2·11100
South East London College	0·69200
Hammersmith/West London	1·01800
Westminster College	0·82700
Residuals	2·42300
Total	102·43937
Avon	
Bristol Poly.	20·40107
Bath CHE	3·79300
Residuals	1·07500
Total	25·26907
Bedfordshire	
Bedford CHE	2·44520
Luton CHE	2·89866
Total	5·34386
Berkshire	
Slough CHE	4·04232
Bulmershe CHE	3·03500
Reading COT	1·45532
Residuals	0·57700
Total	9·10964
Buckinghamshire	
Buckinghamshire CHE	3·00732
Residuals	0·28700
Total	3·29432
Cambridgeshire	
Cambridgeshire C/A and T	3·79698
Residuals	0·70700
Total	4·50398
Cheshire	
Crewe & Alsager CHE	5·94435
North Cheshire College	1·11500
Residuals	0·87700
Total	7·93635
Cleveland	
Teesside Poly.	11·97930
Residuals	0·54900
Total	12·52830
Cornwall	
Falmouth Sch./ART	0·99300
Cornwall Tech.	0·32800
Camborne Sch./MINES	0·98300
Total	2·30400
Cumbria	
Charlotte Mason	1·32150
Residuals	1·19700
Total	2·51850
Derbyshire	
Derby CHE	6·68998
Residuals	0·64000
Total	7·32998
Devon	
Plymouth Poly.	14·95981
Exeter C/A and D	0·86800
Dartington C/ART	1·00200
Rolle College	2·24100
Residuals	2·12300
Total	21·19381
Dorset	
Dorset IHE	7·11332
Bournemouth and Poole C/A and D	0·73800

1988-89	*£ million*
Bournemouth and Poole CFE	0·10000
Total	7·95132
Durham	
New College Durham	1·82600
Residuals	0·40900
Total	2·23500
East Sussex	
Brighton Poly.	17·05598
Brighton COT	0·78900
Residuals	0·25000
Total	18·09498
Essex	
Essex IHE	6·25098
Writtle Agricultural	0·74500
Colchester IHE	1·32000
Residuals	1·17200
Total	9·48798
Gloucestershire	
Gloucester C/A and T	4·46932
Residuals	0·12100
Total	4·59032
Hampshire	
Portsmouth Poly.	19·41514
South Hants ARTS	1·42400
Farnborough COT	2·00600
Southampton IHE	6·39630
Highbury COT	1·30666
Residuals	0·44400
Total	30·99210
Hereford and Worcestershire	
Worcester CHE	3·42840
Residuals	1·16800
Total	4·59640
Hertfordshire	
Hatfield Poly.	16·83425
Watford College	1·27600
Residuals	1·78900
Total	19·89925
Humberside	
Humberside College	9·06064
Residuals	0·28000
Total	9·34064
Isle of Wight	
Isle of Wight C/ART	0·11100
Kent	
Kent Art Inst.	2·32400
Mid Kent CHFE	1·96766
Kent C/Careers	0·12200
Residuals	0·70200
Total	5·11566
Lancashire	
Lancashire Poly.	15·42564
Edge Hill CHE	4·66715
Blackburn C/T and D	0·80700
Blackpool and Fylde	1·79200
Residuals	0·70100
Total	23·39279
Leicestershire	
Leicester Poly.	22·04596
Residuals	0·49600
Total	22·54196
Lincolnshire	
Residuals	0·81500
Norfolk	
Norfolk Art	0·73500
Norwich City College	2·31032
Residuals	0·08900
Total	3·13432
North Yorkshire	
Askham Bryan C/AG	0·33400
North Riding C/ED	1·56600
York C/A and T	0·54100
Total	2·44100
Northamptonshire	
Nene College	5·18232
Residuals	0·9700
Total	5·27932
Northumberland	
Northumberland COT	0·22800
Nottingham	
Trent Poly.	25·10328
Residuals	0·53600
Total	25·63928
Oxfordshire	
Oxford Poly.	14·39462
Residuals	0·36300
Total	14·75762
Shropshire	
Residuals	0·29800
Somerset	
Residuals	0·81500
Staffordshire	
North Staffs Poly.	15·93627
Cauldon CFE	0·61000
Residuals	0·54000
Total	17·08627
Suffolk	
Suffolk CFHE	1·42800
Residuals	0·16600
Total	1·59400
Surrey	
N.E. Surrey C/A and T	1·67698
West Surrey C/A and D	1·70100
Guildford COT	0·87098
Residuals	0·60500
Total	4·85396
Warwickshire	
Residuals	0·31700
West Sussex	
West Sussex IHE[1]	1·64896
Residuals	1·36900
Total	3·01796
Wiltshire	
The College Swindon	0·86100
Residuals	0·79000
Total	1·65100

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[1] Joint LEA assisted/DES grant-aided institution.

PRIME MINISTER

Journalists (Briefing)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister how many daily briefings for journalists have taken place at No. 10 Downing street since she became Prime Minister; and for how many of these a tape recording exists.

The Prime Minister: My press office is in regular contact with journalists.

United States President-elect

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Prime Minister whether she discussed the issue of burden-sharing when she met President-elect George Bush in Washington.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Prime Minister whether she discussed British contributions to the cost of developing the follow-on system to the Lance missile when she met President-elect George Bush in Washington.

The Prime Minister: No.

10 Downing Street (Silver)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what silver items have been loaned for use at No. 10 Downing street; and to whom they belong.

The Prime Minister: No. 10 Downing street has silver on loan from the trustees of the Victoria and Albert and the British Museums and a number of items kindly loaned by private owners whose names it would not be the practice to make public.

Poland (Visit)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the reasons for her visit to Poland; who invited her; by what means she travelled; how many civil servants accompanied her; and what was the total cost involved.

The Prime Minister: I visited Poland in response to an invitation from the Polish Government. I travelled by RAF VC10 and was accompanied by three officials and nine support staff. As I stated in the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 11 November 1988 at column *315*, the provisional estimate of the total cost is £21,000.

United States (Visit)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will give the reasons for her latest visit to the United States of America; who invited her; by what means she travelled; how many civil servants accompanied her; and what was the total cost involved.

The Prime Minister: I visited Washington at the invitation of President Reagan. I travelled by RAF VC10 and was accompanied by three officials and seven support staff. A provisional estimate of the total cost is £50,000.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what official gifts were handed out on her latest visit to the United States of America; to whom they were presented; and what was the total cost involved.

The Prime Minister: As is customary official gifts were given to President Reagan and to a small number of officials.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Property)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now review the list of property which long-term prisoners are able to possess with a view to enabling them, at the discretion of the governor, to possess electronic games of an educational nature.

Mr. Hurd: Prison standing order 4, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, describes privileges available to prisoners and the conditions under which they may be granted. Long-term prisoners in dispersal prisons may, in addition, have in their possession items from a list that is approved by the Prison Department. It has recently been agreed that this list should be amended to include certain electronic games that can be played in prisoners' cells.

Fire Service (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations his Department has received calling for privatisation of the London fire service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None.

Refugee Policy

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with other European Economic Community states concerning a common refugee policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The discussions described in my right hon. Friend's reply of 9 June to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) are continuing.

Guildford Four

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times each of the Guildford four have moved prisons; what the reasons are for their moves; what information he has concerning their medical condition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend wrote to the hon. Member on 22 November in reply to his recent question seeking similar details (col. 881) and a copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

Most of the moves involving the four inmates have been for operational reasons or in the interests of good order and discipline. I have no information which suggests that their present general medical condition is other than satisfactory.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in the case of the Guildford four; and when he expects to make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Since my statement on 20 January 1987, I have received letters from those representing the four people convicted, dated 15 January 1987; 26 January 1987; 27 February 1987; 2 March 1987; 9 April 1987; 20 July 1987; 16 and 29 March 1988; 25 May 1988; 22 and 29 June 1988; 9, 13, 16, 22, 27 and 29 September 1988; 5 and 24 October 1988; 9, 16 and 22 November 1988. These have raised a number of specific points about the case, and some have enclosed other documents. I shall make a statement as soon as I have completed consideration of all the representations recently submitted to me.

Chief Superintendent Alan Coates

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Chief Constable of Somerset into the reasons why Chief Superintendent Alan Coates has been suspended and is currently under investigation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: No. This is a matter for the Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset. It would not be right for me to intervene in such matters in view of my role as the appellate authority in police disciplinary proceedings.

Visas (EC)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions with other European Community members concerning the requirement of visas for non-European Community nationals have taken place; and what is his policy towards a common visa requirement throughout the Community.

Mr. Renton: At a meeting in Copenhagen on 9 December 1987, the Ministers of the states of the European Community concerned with immigration agreed to a common list of 50 countries whose nationals should require a visa if they wished to enter any country in the Community. An extension of the list was agreed upon in Munich on 3 June 1988, and there have been discussions among officials about further extensions. We acknowledge the contribution which harmonisation of visa regimes could make to strengthening the external frontiers of the Community, but other factors must also contribute to determining the United Kingdom's visa policy.

War Dead (Disposal)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if guidance on the disposal of the dead in the event of war has been issued to police forces; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the Metropolitan police has received training or instruction regarding the disposal of the dead in the event of war; and if he will make a statement;

(3) when the subject of disposal of the dead in war was last discussed at meetings of *(a)* the police war duties committee and *(b)* the standing working party of police staff officers on home defence planning; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: All police forces have been advised that the disposal of the dead in war is a local authority responsibility. Questions of discussion with representatives of the police service and training have not therefore arisen.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the local authority civil defence plans for the disposal of the dead in war requested by his Department for the October deadline of the planned programme for implementation.

Mr. Hurd: Such plans, and plans in relation to a number of other civil defence matters, are being examined by officials of my Department. The regular discussions with individual local authorities which take place as part of the planned programme for implementation enable conclusions to be conveyed to them.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the subject of disposal of the dead in war was last discussed at the Civil Defence committee of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: The proceedings of the Civil Defence committee are subject to a NATO security classification.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources are being made available to London local authorities to draw up plans to deal with the disposal of dead bodies in the event of nuclear war.

Mr. Hurd: Civil defence grant is payable towards expenses incurred by local authorities in London in carrying out their statutory function to make, keep under review and revise such plans.

Civil Defence Planning

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the order of magnitude of casualties likely to result from *(a)* conventional attack, and *(b)* nuclear attack, as identified in his Department's guidance on civil defence planning assumption.

Mr. Hurd: Advice on the likely effects of attacks is given in section 2 paragraphs 10, 15 and 16 of the "Emergency Planning Guidance to Local Authorities".

Response to Disaster Review

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish details of the Association of Chief Police Officers' review of response to disasters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: This is a matter for the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what efforts are made by his Department to provide the public with details of emergency planning.

Mr. Hurd: The publication "Emergency Planning Guidance to Local Authorities", which was issued to local authorities in 1985, is available to members of the public on request and can be found in public libraries. Work is in hand to revise and amplify the guidance. A booklet entitled "Civil Protection", published in 1986, and a current quarterly magazine of the same name set out the basis of emergency planning arrangements and give information on current issues.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to impose a duty on local authorities to prepare adequate emergency plans for peacetime disasters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Duties are already imposed on local authorities in relation to emergency planning under the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984. Suggestions for a more general duty on local authorities have been raised as part of current discussions on the structure of the response to civil emergencies in the United Kingdom.

Nuclear War

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what role local authorities will be expected to perform in the event of nuclear war.

Mr. Hurd: The functions of local authorities in a war emergency are prescribed by regulations made under section 2 of the Civil Defence Act 1948, in particular the Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations 1983 (S.I. 1983/1634). Guidance on the discharge of these functions is contained in the publication "Emergency Planning Guidance to Local Authorities", a copy of which is in the Library.

Carlisle Committee

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the Report of the Carlisle committee on parole.

Mr. Hurd: The report of the Committee on the Parole System in England and Wales under the chairmanship of Lord Carlisle of Bucklow is published today. I am most grateful to Lord Carlisle and his colleagues for completing this wide-ranging review in just over a year, and for producing so clear and thought-provoking a report.

The Committee proposes that:

(a) for prisoners serving sentences of four years or less, parole should be replaced by conditional release after half the sentence has been served, unless release is delayed on account of misbehaviour;

(b) for prisoners serving sentences of more than four years, there should continue to be a selective system of parole, but they would become eligible only after serving half their sentences, instead of one-third as under the present law;

(c) everyone sentenced to twelve months or more and all young offenders should be subject to a period of supervision by the probation service after release;

(d) all prisoners should, if convicted of a further offence committed before the full term of their sentence has expired, be liable (in addition to any new sentence imposed) to return to prison for so much of their original sentence as has not already been served in custody;

(e) partly suspended sentences should be abolished.

These and other recommendations would require legislation.

The report deals with issues of great importance. Some of the Committee's recommendations raise difficult questions in the context of the Government's policies for ensuring that the public is adequately protected and that offenders who commit serious crimes are adequately punished. I shall be considering how best these questions might be resolved, and I shall welcome the widest expression of parliamentary, public and professional opinion on the issues raised by the report. It would be helpful if comments on it could reach the Home Office by 10 March 1989.

For the present the existing statutory scheme and the existing criteria will remain in force.

SCOTLAND

Schools (Technical Drawing)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what decisions have been taken on the recommendations made by the review group on the future of technical drawing in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has decided after careful consideration of the review group's recommendations that a standard grade course in technical drawing should now be developed to replace ordinary grade. The new course will be constructed in modular form so that it can also be offered as a series of short courses to provide maximum flexibility. A revised higher in technical drawing will also be developed to follow on from the new standard grade.

NHS (Funding)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what additional funds he proposes to make available to the Health Service in Scotland;

(2) what extra money he will make available for increased spending in the priority services for the elderly and the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend will announce shortly his plans for financial allocations for all Scottish Office services, including health, for the years 1989-90 to 1991-92.

Sharpen Report

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement outlining the Government's response to the issues raised in the Sharpen report.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government's response to the recommendations of the Sharpen report is set out in my right hon. and learned Friend's foreword to the report published on 9 November and in "The Scottish Health Service" published on 2 November. Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

Investment Grants

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give *(a)* the total number of applications received for investment grants from 1 April to the most recent date for which figures are available, *(b)* the total number of applications approved, *(c)* the total amount of expenditure involved and *(d)* the total estimated expenditure planned for that period and the estimated expenditure for 1989-90 and 1990-91;

(2) if he will give *(a)* the total number of applications received for innovation grants from 1 April to the most recent date for which figures are available, *(b)* the total number of applications approved, *(c)* the total amount of expenditure involved and *(d)* the total estimated expenditure planned for that period and estimated expenditure for 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is as follows for the period 1 April to 31 October.

Regional Enterprise Grants	
(i) Investment grants	
Number of applications received:	182
Number of applications approved:	84
Value of applications approved:	£527·7 thousand
(ii) Innovation grants	
Number of applications received:	46
Number of offers applications approved:	11
Value of applications approved:	£260·6 thousand

The provision for regional enterprise grants for the financial year 1988-89 is £1·6 million. The provision for regional assistance for 1989-90 and 1990-91 will be announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland in his December statement. Figures for individual programmes will be published in the Scottish Commentary in February 1989.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those boards which are planned to have *(a)* basic screening units and *(b)* specialist assessment teams as part of the breast cancer screening programme; and if he will give the latest estimates when each team and each unit will commence service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Basic screening units will be provided for all boards in Scotland by a mixture of static and mobile units, some shared between boards. On the basis of present plans specialist assessment will be available in Lothian, Greater Glasgow, Grampian, Tayside and Ayrshire and Arran health board areas. Lothian and Greater Glasgow are already providing basic screening and assessment services. Discussions are continuing with health boards for the implementation of the whole programme by March 1991.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those boards which are planned to have *(a)* mobile screening units and *(b)* static screening units.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: On the basis of present plans the information is as follows:

(a) Health boards with mobile screening units
Argyll and Clyde
Ayrshire and Arran
Grampian
Greater Glasgow
Highland
Lanarkshire
Lothian
Tayside

(b) Health boards with static screening units
Ayrshire and Arran
Forth Valley
Grampian
Greater Glasgow
Lothian
Tayside

A basic screening service will be available in all health board areas although some boards will share a mobile service with neighbouring boards.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the measures being taken to adapt existing computerised call/recall cervical cancer screening programmes to accommodate the breast cancer screening programme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Because of differences in the age range of women involved and in the screening intervals we are not adapting the computerised cervical cancer call and recall system to accommodate the breast cancer screening programme in Scotland. We are developing a new computer programme, with the assistance of ICL, for the breast cancer screening call and recall and office systems.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those boards where women are already being called by a computerised system for breast cancer screening; and if he will give the age bands of the women being called.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The programme in Lothian health board is currently being run on an existing computer programme which was developed with Edinburgh university during the research into the feasibility of introducing nationwide screening. This will be subsumed early next year by the national computer programme currently being developed. Women in the age range 50 to 64 are being called in Lothian.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about measures currently being taken to train staff to work in specialist assessment teams.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have established a national training centre in Edinburgh which is charged with the responsibility for training staff from all the disciplines concerned with breast cancer screening and assessment. One course was held in September 1988 and two more are planned for March and September 1989. It is intended to have courses to link in with units being brought into operation.

Legal Aid

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will outline the policy which underlies the decision not to operate the legal aid system for applicants in industrial tribunals.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Because tribunal procedures are not adversarial, and are intended to be comparatively informal, it should not be necessary for persons appearing before them to have legal representation.

Legal advice and assistance is however available to an eligible applicant for general advice on a case coming before a tribunal, and for assistance with preparatory work.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will provide each member of staff assessing entitlement to housing benefit transitional payments with a copy of the procedure to be used to calculate entitlement.

Mr. Scott: All members of staff at the transitional payments unit have received full training on the procedures for calculating eligibility to transitional payments. These detailed procedures are contained within a manual of instructions to which all members of staff have full access.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what procedure is used to calculate entitlement to housing benefit transitional payments.

Mr. Scott: Leaflet RR4 "Housing Benefit—New Rules" contains an explanation of the method for calculating housing benefit transitional payments. A copy of the leaflet is in the Library. More detailed instructions have been produced for the staff at the transitional payments unit.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims have been made for housing benefit transitional protection; and how many of these were *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful.

Mr. Scott: Of the 381,574 applications for housing benefit transitional payments received by the transitional payments unit at 22 November, 281,416 had been assessed. 141,140 applications were successful and 140,276 cases were not. In 73,524 cases the transitional payments unit are awaiting the return of inquiry forms from local authorities.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether he plans to introduce an appeals procedure against decisions taken under the housing benefits transitional arrangements;

(2) whether there is any current facility for appealing against decisions under the housing benefit transitional arrangements.

Mr. Scott: Transitional payments are made by the Department of Social Security on behalf of the Secretary of State on an extra-statutory basis and therefore carry no formal right of appeal. However we have adopted a review procedure whereby applicants who are not satisfied with the notice of award/refusal which they have received can write to the unit and request that the decision on their application be looked at again. When such a request is received the case is looked at again by a different officer of a more senior grade to check that the case has been dealt with correctly.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current average waiting time for decisions under the housing benefit transitional arrangements.

Mr. Scott: The clearance times for applications for transitional payments will vary considerably from case to case and depend on how long the local authorities take to return the inquiry forms and whether further inquiries have to be made from the unit. But for straightforward cases, it takes at present two days from receiving an application in the unit to sending the inquiry form to the local authority, 31 days for the local authority to return the inquiry form to the unit, and a further five days from receiving that inquiry form at the unit to deciding whether a payment can be made. The transitional payments unit has contacted a number of local authorities to encourage them to return the inquiry forms more promptly.

Social Fund

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to publicise the availability of the social fund in advice agencies and social services departments.

Mr. Scott: An information pack on the social fund was issued to social services and social work departments, health authorities and a number of voluntary organisations earlier this year. DSS local offices also give information to both statutory and voluntary local agencies about the social fund. Leaflet SB16 "A guide to the Social Fund" is aimed specifically at professional and voluntary advisers and is available from local social security offices.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he has taken to publicise the availability of the social fund; and at what expense.

Mr. Scott: Information about the availability of social fund payments is contained in a variety of leaflets, forms and posters and also in leaflet SB16 "A guide to the Social Fund". Over £550,000 has been spent to date on publicity material on the social fund.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether he will publish a table showing the number of *(a)* social fund applications, *(b)* social fund rejections, *(c)* applications for review of the decisions taken by social fund officers, *(d)* decisions revised by social fund officers on review, *(e)* applications to the social fund inspector, *(f)* decisions upheld by the social fund inspector, *(g)* decisions referred back to the social fund officer by the social fund inspector and *(h)* applications for judicial review of social fund decisions;

(2) whether he will publish a table showing, for each social fund office in England, Wales and Scotland, the monthly expenditure figures for *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans, and indicate for each office the proportion of the projected expenditure which has been spent to date.

Mr. Scott: Information relating to items *(a)* to *(g)* is contained in the national tables which have been placed in the Library as my hon. Friend announced in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Mr. Howell) on 9 November at columns *223-24*. There have been no applications for judicial review.

Information on monthly expenditure by local offices and on their individual allocations is also in the Library.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of social fund expenditure has been budgeted to replace those situations previously covered by the Supplementary Benefits (Urgent Cases) Regulations.

Mr. Scott: There is no separate budget specifically to cover the situations previously covered by the urgent cases regulations. However, for planning purposes the total loans budget allocation of £143 million assumed a sum of £33 million being for crisis loans, which includes an element for situations covered by the urgent cases regulations.

Benefits

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the latest estimated amount of benefit being paid out to patients in private care/rest homes for *(a)* each of his Department's benefit centres, *(b)* each region and *(c)* the nation as a whole.

Mr. Scott: Information is not available in the form requested at *(a)* and *(b)*. However, the annual income support expenditure on people in independent residential care and nursing homes in Great Britain as a whole was estimated to be £878 million in May 1988.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Invisible Earnings

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his estimate for the value of invisible earnings, attributable to design, in each of the last eight years.

Mr. Forth: There are no separate available statistics on the value of invisible earnings attributable to design. Such figures are included indistinguishably in the services sector.

Design Policy

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of his Department's staff are employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time on design policy.

Mr. Forth: Seven administrative staff are engaged in design policy work in the Department. All seven are full-time employees, but only five spend their whole time on such work.

These figures do not include staff engaged on the design initiative.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the budget for his Department's *(a)* design campaign and *(b)* design initiative.

Mr. Forth: The budget allocation for the Department's design promotion work in 1988-89 is £7·526 million. This includes a £5·885 million grant in aid to the Design Council.

There is no specific budget provision for the design initiative which is one of six demand-led consultancy options within the enterprise initiative. However, over 14 per cent. of current demand is for the design initiative and, to date, over £5 million has been committed to design projects.

Unemployment Data

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of the areas proposed by the Government for inclusion in the list of objective 2 areas have a lower unemployment rate than the Wakefield metropolitan district.

Mr. Maude: Unemployment data are compiled for travel-to-work areas and are therefore not available for Wakefield metropolitan district in a form directly comparable with those for other areas.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many areas proposed by the Government for inclusion in the list of objective 2 areas include or belong to travel-to-work areas which have a lower unemployment rate than Wakefield and Dewsbury.

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many areas proposed by the Government for inclusion in the list of objective 2 areas include or belong to travel-to-work areas which have a lower unemployment rate than Pontefract and Castleford.

Mr. Maude: The areas proposed by the Government to the European Comission for inclusion in the list to qualify for the European structural funds under objective 2 include Wakefield city metropolitan district as one of the "most seriously affected" parts of West Yorkshire. The district contains the whole of Wakefield and Dewsbury travel-to-work area and part of Pontefract and Castleford travel-to-work area.

The unemployment criterion for objective 2 regions is an average of three year's figures and is to be applied variously at county and lower level, according to the case. There are also other criteria, of equal importance.

There are 22 travel-to-work areas concerned which at present have a lower unemployment rate than Wakefield and Dewsbury, and a further 19 with a rate lower than Pontefract and Castleford.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many intermediate areas in the United Kingdom have a lower unemployment rate than the Wakefield and Dewsbury travel-to-work area.

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many intermediate areas in the United Kingdom have a lower unemployment rate than the Pontefract and Castleford travel-to-work area.

Mr. Maude: There are at present 17 intermediate areas with a lower monthly unemployment rate than the Wakefield and Dewsbury travel-to-work area, and a further 18 with a lower rate than the Castleford and Pontefract travel-to-work area. These figures are based on the unadjusted unemployment rates for October 1988[1]. The unemployment rate was only one factor considered when the assisted areas map was drawn up in 1984.

Structural Funds (Assistance)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the European Commission has accepted Her Majesty's Government's view that objective 2 areas should not be restricted to the present assisted areas.

Mr. Maude: Yes. Indeed the proposal to this effect originated with the Commission. Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2052/88 contains no provision to the contrary.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the negotiations taking place with the European Commission are intended to reduce the list of areas proposed by the Government for objective 2 status; and whether assisted area status will be used as a criterion in such a reduction.

Mr. Maude: This question does not yet arise. The Government put their proposals to the European Commission in July, and stand by them. The Commission is not yet ready to discuss them with us.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Harland and Wolff

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends to await more detail of the Sealink interest in placing work with Harland and Wolff before taking a decision on either of the two bids for the privatisation of the yard or the management worker buy-out.

Mr. Viggers: That is my intention though I am anxious that negotiations over the future of the company are concluded quickly.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to what extent he estimates that delay on deciding on a manager worker buy-out by Harland and Wolff will result in losing the Ultimate Dream contract.

Mr. Viggers: I have been having discussions with the chairman of Harland and Wolff and his colleagues on their ideas for a management/employee buy-out, I am ready to give immediate consideration to any proposal which they may decide to make. No formal bid has yet been put forward and I understand that they are still considering whether to base their proposals on the negotiation of an order for the Ultimate Dream or on other possibilities. The eventual negotiation of any order is, of course, a matter for the buy-out team.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current position of all bids and declared interests in purchasing Harland and Wolff, Belfast.

Mr. Viggers: Detailed negotiations are under way with two companies which have submitted proposals for the acquisition of Harland and Wolff—both involving orders for new ships. I have also had discussions with the chairman of the company and his colleagues about the basis for a possible management/employee buy-out. Details of these discussions are commercially confidential.

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[1] The rates were calculated on the basis of the number of unemployed claimants expressed as a percentage of employees in employment and the unemployed for each travel-to-work area in Great Britain on 13 October 1988.

ENERGY

War Dead (Disposal)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he proposes to make special provision of fuel stocks for use by local authorities in utilising cremation as a means of disposal of the dead in the event of war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Yes.

Petroleum Engineering Inspectorate

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish staffing figures for the petroleum engineering inspectorate in each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The number of inspectors employed in the petroleum engineering inspectorate and the number of vacancies since 1980 is set out in the table.

Date	*Staff in post*	*Vacancies*
June 1980	25	3
July 1981	31	2
March 1982	32	3
October 1985	27	6
March 1987	36	8
July 1988	37	9
November 1988	39	7

Prior to 1988, figures are available only for the dates shown.

WALES

Housing (Rural Areas)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes taking to relieve the pressure on local people in rural parts of Wales who are experiencing difficulties in securing houses within their own communities, for renting or for purchase, because of the price increases during 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: We propose to increase to £1 million the funds available to local authorities in rural areas with a high concentration of second homes to purchase homes for sale or rent to local people. In addition Housing for Wales will devote a substantial proportion of its development programme to rural areas.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* the actual and *(b)* the percentage fall in unemployment from August 1983 to August 1988 in each parliamentary constituency in Clwyd, Gwynedd and Powys.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information requested is as follows:

Total unemployed claimants[1]

	August 1983	*August 1988*	*Actual change*	*Percentage change*
Clwyd				
Alyn and Deeside	4,684	2,811	−1,873	−40·0
Clwyd North West	3,888	3,721	−167	−4·3
Clwyd South West	3,549	2,667	−882	−24·9
Delyn	4,969	3,066	−1,903	−38·3
Wrexham	5,095	3,152	−1,943	−38·1
Gwynedd				
Caernarfon	2,929	2,571	−358	−12·2
Conwy	2,937	2,812	−125	−4·3
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	1,434	1,217	−217	−15·1
Ynys Môn	4,009	3,647	−362	−9·0
Powys				
Brecon and Radnor	2,050	1,735	−315	−15·4
Montgomery	1,886	1,404	−482	−25·6

Source: Department of Employment.

[1] The figures are affected by a change in the compilation of the unemployment statistics in March 1986 to reduce over-recording.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Postage Costs

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what additional postage costs have been incurred by the Inland Revenue since 1 January, by issuing tax assessments to agents in separate envelopes rather than in bulk.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I am afraid that this information is not available.

The Department has plans to utilise automatic mail handling equipment that will bring most agents' copies together, though it is unlikely that the new arrangements will be in place before 1990.

Woodlands (Maintenance Costs)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate costs previously claimed by woodland owners as maintenance expenses incurred in their woodland activities which were offset against income derived from other schedule D sources in Scotland and in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret that the information on which to base a reliable estimate is not available centrally.

EC Budget Council

Mr. Bright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent meeting of the European Community's Budget Council.

Mr. Brooke: The council considered the European Parliament's amendments and modifications to the 1989 draft budget established on 26 July at columns *500-01;* and the Commission's proposed amending letter. The revised draft budget to which the council agreed totalled 46,190 mecu (about £32,100 million) in commitments and 44,668 mecu (about £31,050 million) in payments.

As regards non-compulsory expenditure, the council accepted amendments totalling 109 mecu (about £75 million) in commitments and 96 mecu (about £65 million) in payments (around one third of the total increases proposed by the Parliament at its first reading of the budget on 27 October). Only a small part of the amendments to which the council agreed were for "privileged" expenditure (the structural funds, the R and D framework programme and the integrated Mediterranean programmes). The bulk were for other, "non-privileged" non-compulsory expenditure. The overall growth of this form of expenditure in the revised draft budget by comparison with 1988 is 5·6 per cent. in commitment and 5·4 per cent. in payments, somewhat below the calculated maximum rate of 5·8 per cent. communicated by the Commission at the beginning of the budget procedure.

As regards compulsory expenditure, the council established an amending letter which, amongst other things, reduces the total provision for agricultural guarantee expenditure in the 1989 draft budget by 1,366 mecu (about £950 million) and increases the United Kingdom's abatement in 1989 under the Fontainebleau mechanism by 50 mecu (about £35 million).

Taking all of these factors together, the revised draft budget is around 2,200 mecu (about £1,500 million) below the overall ceiling in the financial perspective attached to the inter-institutional agreement (IIA) between the council, the Parliament and the Commission.

The council also agreed the basis on which it would enter into a process of co-decision with the European Parliament under article 203(9) of the Treaty to agree the overall growth of non-compulsory expenditure at the time of the Parliament's second reading of the budget in the week beginning 12 December.

CIVIL SERVICE

Foreign Visits

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what amount was reclaimed from his Office for expenditure incurred by Her Majesty's Embassies and High Commissions arising from ministerial visits abroad in the last financial year.

Mr. Luce: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 27 October at column *372*.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service in what form his Office maintains details of amounts reclaimed by Her Majesty's Embassies and High Commissions for costs arising from ministerial visits abroad.

Mr. Luce: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 7 November 1988 at column 40.

THE ARTS

Libraries Green Paper

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will place responses to the libraries Green Paper in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: Public disclosures of the responses to the Green Paper is a matter for those who replied: some have chosen to publish their answers. As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) on 7 November 1988 at column *14*, I will in due course make a statement in the House on the representations made to me.

DEFENCE

Development Programmes

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) further to the Government's reply to the third report from the Defence Committee, House of Commons Paper 674, how long a delay in a development programme must be before it is considered significant enough to report to the Defence Committee;

(2) what other criteria, apart from the length of time, are considered when deciding whether or not to inform the Defence Committee of delays in development programmes.

Mr. Sainsbury: A major project statement (MPS) is sent each year to the Public Accounts Committee and the Defence Committee, giving details of in-service dates and development and production costs of major defence equipments. In addition, the first in an annual series of defence equipment project reports (DEPR), containing information of a similar character, was sent to the Defence Committee last May. The primary criterion for inclusion of an individual equipment item in either document is whether it exceeds a cost threshold: length of delay in a development programme has no bearing on inclusion or exclusion. For fuller descriptions of these documents I would refer the hon. Member to HC371 pages 18-22 as regards the MPS and HC340 page xxxiii as regards the DEPR.

AWE Capital Programme

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he decided to commission the British Nuclear Fuels' audit of the capital works programme at Aldermaston and Burghfield, which reported in February 1986; and why he decided to commission this report;

(2) when he agreed that the controller R & D establishments research and nuclear programmes should carry out a review of 32 AWRE projects; and why he decided to commission this report.

Mr. Sainsbury: Following indications that the estimated total cost of the AWE capital programme was rising and that slippage was forecast, MoD Ministers endorsed a limited independent programme audit by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. (BNFL) in November 1985. The BNFL report was received by my Department on 7 March 1986. In the light of this Ministers subsequently agreed that the controller establishments and research and nuclear programmes should carry out a review of a wider group of 32 AWE capital and works projects. The reasons for the review are given in detail in paragraph 10—appendix 4 to the Comptroller and Auditor General's report on the "Control and Management of the Trident Programme" (HC 27).

Smith Report

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will publish the Smith report on the future management of non-nuclear research establishments.

Mr. Sainsbury: The report by the defence research study team into the feasibility of establishing the non-nuclear defence research establishments as an executive agency was submitted in the summer. We are now considering the way ahead in the light of its conclusions and recommendations. This will include the question of publication of the report.

Statistics Organisation

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the report on the possibility of using the private sector in the Defence statistics organisation.

Mr. Sainsbury: The report examined the potential for using the private sector in the work of the Defence statistics organisation. It represented a preliminary stage in the process leading towards a full feasibility study. It is not appropriate to publish such an internal advisory document.

Milan 2T

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department will be participating in the Milan 2T tandem warhead development programme.

Mr. Sainsbury: Currently we have no requirement for an alternative Milan warhead and accordingly are not participating in the Milan 2T warhead development programme.

Gunnery Competition

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether British Army units will be participating in next year's Canadian Army gunnery competition.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Challenge

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to improve the fire control system currently fitted to the Challenger tank.

Mr. Sainsbury: Improvement to the fire control system for existing Challenger tanks are currently under development.

Battlefield Lasers

Mr. Allan Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the value of the two contracts placed with Ferranti for the development of battlefield lasers capable of inflicting damage on optical sensors; when the contracts were placed; and if these contracts specify that the lasers should be capable of inflicting temporary damage to the human eyeball.

Mr. Sainsbury: The contract placed wth Ferranti Defence Systems covers investigation of laser technology alone and does not specify the requirement to inflict any damage, temporary or permanent, on any sensor, including the human eyeball. The contract was placed in 1982 but its terms and value are a commercial matter between the Department and Ferranti.

War Dead (Disposal)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has carried out or commissioned research into the psychological difficulties likely to be experienced by those involved in mass burials in the event of war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There has not been any research into the psychological difficulties likely to be experienced by those involved in mass burials in the event of war. The effects upon those individuals suffering from post traumatic stress disorder following their experiences in all aspects of the Falklands campaign have been observed.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has carried out or commissioned research into disposal of the dead in the event of war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Tri-Service policy on the disposal of bodies of service personnel killed in action overseas was reviewed in 1983, mainly as a result of the Falklands conflict.

It was agreed that bodies of service personnel killed in action should in the first instance, and in accordance with established practice, be buried locally. The question of later burial in military cemeteries close to the battle areas, or of repatriation of the bodies, will be decided after the cessation of hostilities.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements exist in his Department for the provision of military assistance to local authorities for the disposal of the dead in the event of war.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No troops are specifically allocated to undertake military aid to civil authorities. In the event of war, any requests by local authorities for the provision of military assistance to carry out tasks in the community would be considered in the light of the circumstances and availability of resources at the time.

TRANSPORT

Air Misses

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will be issuing a report on the air miss between aircraft of British Airways and Bulgarian Ailines which occurred on 6 February; and if he intends to make a statement to the House.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In accordance with the regulations, a draft of the report has been sent by the air accident investigation branch, in confidence, to those persons whose reputations might be adversely affected by it, to give them an opportunity to make representations to the inspector.

The Chief Inspector of Accidents expects to present the report to the Secretary of State by early in the new year. The report should be published a few weeks thereafter, provided there is no review board requested by affected persons.

London Assessment Studies

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if any limits on access to the London transportation survey model have been laid down in respect of the consultants for the London assessment studies.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the London assessment studies; and when he expects to make a statement on future road planning for London.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have received representations on various aspects of the assessment studies from the London local authority associations, the London Planning Advisory Committee, individual local authorities, national organisations with an interest in transport matters, amenity groups, residents associations, and members of the public.

The consultants are due to submit their reports in summer 1989. There will then be an opportunity for public comment before any decisions are taken.

Channel Tunnel

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport from how many companies and consortia of companies bids have been invited to pre-qualify for the financing and construction of a new railway link between London and the Channel tunnel by the private sector; and if he will make a statement on the progress with this initiative.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that the British Railways Board's invitation is a general one which has not been restricted to particular companies or consortia. Interest has been expressed by a number of companies, but no firm applications have yet been received by the board. The deadline for applications is the end of January 1989.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether, if British Rail's proposed high-speed line between London and the Channel tunnel is financed in the public sector, the cost of the associated environmental works will form part of the capital cost of the project for the purpose of calculating the rate of return.

Mr. Portillo: Yes.

Marine Inspectorate

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish staffing figures for the marine inspectorate in each year since 1979.

Mr. Portillo: The staff-in-post figures for each of the years are as follows:

	Figures
1979	605·0
1980	582·5
1981	559·0
1982	510·0
1983	504·5
1984	509·0
1985	484·5
1986	446·0
1987	412·5
1988	380·5

Railway Inspectorate

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish staffing figures for the railway inspectorate in each year since 1979.

Mr. Portillo: Staffing figures for the railway inspectorate for each year since 1979, as at 31 December, are:

	Number
1979	36
1980	37
1981	37
1982	35
1983	35
1984	36
1985	36
1986	32
1987	31

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Deoxygenated Water

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has of the existence and location of large areas of deoxygenated water in the seas around Britain and of the causes of this condition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: There has been no evidence of any such areas in British coastal waters for a number of years.

EC (Cereals)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the United Kingdom intervention price for cereals would have been at 1988 values, for each year 1975 to 1988 if there had been no green pound disparity.

Mr. Ryder: The table sets out the prices at which feed quality wheat would have been bought into intervention in the United Kingdom if it is assumed that common agricultural prices had been converted at the market rate of exchange for the pound sterling obtaining at the beginning of the marketing year. These prices have been converted to 1988 values using the GDP deflator.

Marketing year beginning in	[1]*£ per tonne*
1975	154
1976	169
1977	180
1978	176
1979	175
1980	152
1981	133
1982	133
1983	134
1984	136
1985	120
1986	129
1987	131
1988	114

[1] (rounded to nearest £).

Note: Basic co-responsibility levy has been deducted from 1986: the full additional co-responsibility levy has been deducted in 1988, though in practice producers will receive some refund of this. The amount of levy deducted, per tonne in 1988 values, is as follows: 1986, £4·20; 1987, £4·57; 1988, £8·19.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the United Kingdom intervention price for cereals, at 1988 values, for each year 1975 to 1988, together with the co-responsibility levy, where applicable, which would have been deductable.

Mr. Ryder: The following is the information:

Intervention/buying in prices for feed quality wheat: 1988 values
Marketing year beginning in:

	£ per tonne
1975	148
1976	157
1977	160
1978	170
1979	167
1980	155
1981	148
1982	149
1983	146
1984	138
1985	128
1986	115
1987	108
1988	98

Notes:

1. Rounded to nearest £1.
2. The prices shown are start of season intervention/buying in prices applicable in the United Kingdom for feed quality grain converted to 1988 prices using the GDP deflator.
3. Prices for 1975 to 1977 were those established under transitional arrangements.
4. Basic co-responsibility levy has been deducted from 1986: the full additional co-responsibility levy has been deducted in 1988, though in practice producers will receive some refund of this. The amount of levy deducted per tonne in 1988 values, is as follows: 1986, £3·76; 1987, £3·75; 1988, £7·06. (Although from 1 January 1989 this will be reduced to £5·57.)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what he anticipates will be *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* total European Economic Community intervention stocks of cereals at 1 January 1989.

Mr. Ryder: At 13 November 1988 the quantity of unsold intervention stocks held in the Community was 9·9 million tonnes of which 1·4 million tonnes was held in the United Kingdom. I cannot forecast possible changes in these stocks by 1 January, but a note setting out the volume of intervention stocks in the United Kingdom and the EEC is deposited in the Library of the House and is updated monthly.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current annual consumption in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the European Economic Community of (i) cereals produced within the European Economic Community and (ii) cereals imported from outside the European Economic Community.

Mr. Ryder: The information requested, relating to the past complete marketing year (1987-88) is as follows:

million tonnes

	United Kingdom	*European Economic Community*
Consumption of cereals produced within the European Economic Community	19·3	126·6
Consumption of cereals imported from outside the European Economic Community	0·8	8·1

Source: EC Commission Balance Sheet 1987-88.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the total European Economic Community intervention stock levels for cereals, at 1 January in each year from 1975 to 1988.

Mr. Ryder: The unsold intervention stocks, at a date nearest to 1 January for each of the years 1977 to 1988, are as follows. Stock levels for 1975 and 1976 are not available.

Unsold intervention stocks[1]

Year	*million tonnes*
1977	[2]2·1
1978	[2]1·1
1979	[2]1·9
1980	[2]2·6
1981	[3]6·7
1982	[3]4·3
1983	[3]9·0
1984	[3]8·9
1985	[3]11·9
1986	[4]16·4
1987	[4]12·9
1988	[4]8·1

[1] *Source:* EC Commission Intervention Stock Tables.

[2] EC 9.

[3] EC 10.

[4] EC 12.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the United Kingdom intervention stock levels of cereals in each year, at 1 January, from 1975 to 1988.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The information is as follows:

	Tonnes
1975	Nil
1976	Nil
1977	Nil
1978	Nil
1979	20,921
1980	416
1981	619,542
1982	444,853
1983	1,546,194
1984	836,665
1985	2,831,303
1986	5,701,123
1987	3,793,565
1988	1,111,926

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the total *(a)* United Kingdom and *(b)* European Economic Community cereal harvest in each year from 1975 to 1988.

Mr. Ryder: The information requested is as follows:

Million tonnes

	[1]*United Kingdom*	[2]*European Economic Community*
1975	13·9	[5]97·1
1976	13·3	[5]90·4
1977	16·7	[5]103·6
1978	17·3	[5]116·1
1979	17·4	[5]113·4
1980	19·5	[5]119·2
1981	19·6	[6]122·5
1982	21·9	[6]131·7
1983	21·3	[6]123·7
1984	26·6	[6]151·1
1985	22·5	[6]138·8

	[1]*United Kingdom*	[2]*European Economic Community*
1986	24·5	[7]153·8
1987	[3]21·7	[3] [7]154·0
1988	[4]21·0	[4] [7]162·5

[1] *Source:* Annual Review of Agriculture.

[2] *Source:* Agriculture Situation in the Community Reports 1975-87.

[3] Forecast.

[4] Estimate.

[5] EC 9.

[6] EC 10.

[7] EC 12.

Animal Corpses (Cremation)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has carried out or commissioned research into the mass cremation of animal corpses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My Department has gained experience of the mass cremation of animal corpses in dealing with disease but has not carried out or commissioned any specific research into the matter.

War Dead (Disposal)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement regarding the prevention of pollution of food supplies arising from the disposal of the dead in the event of war.

Mr. Ryder: Arrangements for those killed in the event of war would depend on the type of attack sustained. Any hazard to food supplies would be assessed in the light of circumstances.

HEALTH

NHS (Agency Staff)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to review the amount agencies charge the National Health Service for hiring medical staff for work in hospitals or as locums; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: No. Health authorities may have to pay over 120 per cent. more for an agency doctor than they would for an NHS-employed doctor doing the same job. The spending on agency staff increased from £26·3 million in 1984-85 to an estimated £32·2 million in the current year. I have today told health authorities that the amount that they can pay agencies supplying locums will be pegged at 1987-88 levels. This will save some £750,000 in England this financial year. I am consulting health authorities, the medical profession and the agencies about proposals designed to produce further savings in future years.

Care of the Elderly

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list by regional health authority *(a)* the number of 65 to 70 year olds receiving National Health Service care and *(b)* the number of 65 to 70 year olds receiving private sector care;

(2) if he will list by regional health authority *(a)* the number of 70 to 75 year olds receiving National Health Service care and *(b)* the number of 70 to 75 year olds receiving private sector care;

(3) if he will list by regional health authority *(a)* the number of 75 to 80 year olds receiving National Health Service care and *(b)* the number of 75 to 80 year olds receiving private sector care;

(4) if he will list by regional health authority *(a)* the number of 80 to 85 year olds receiving National Health Service care and *(b)* the number of 80 to 85 year olds receiving private sector care;

(5) if he will list by regional health authority *(a)* the number of people over 85 years old receiving National Health Service care and *(b)* the number of people over 85 years old receiving private sector care.

Mrs. Currie: There are many aspects of care for elderly people provided by the NHS. We do not hold information about the use made of all NHS services, on the basis of age groups. Similarly we do not hold information by age group on the use made of all kinds of private sector care.

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the balance of care for the elderly, between the private and public sectors;

(2) whether his Department is monitoring the growth of the private sector in the field of care of the elderly; and what steps are being taken to measure whether the private sector can meet future consumer demands.

Mrs. Currie: We collect annual statistics on provision in private nursing homes and residential care homes registered under the Registered Homes Act 1984. We do not collect information centrally about private domiciliary care. We see the future of both health and social services care as one in which the individual and his or her family should have a choice. In the light of Sir Roy Griffiths' report we are considering how the provision of care should be organised across all sectors to best address future consumer demands.

Intermediate Treatment Initiative

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many projects funded under the intermediate treatment initiative of local authority circular 63/3 have had their grants withdrawn or suspended; and for what reasons.

Mrs. Currie: A total of 110 projects were set up under the intermediate treatment initiative in England. None have had their grants withdrawn. Initiative grants are paid on a quarterly basis. A number of projects have had such payments suspended at some point. This was because either they accumulated a large balance of unspent grant; or their annual acounts were overdue; or, in a few cases, because the project did not fully comply with the conditions of the grant. Grants to three projects are currently suspended for one of these reasons.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals in Birmingham which have received ministerial visits since June 1987.

Mrs. Currie: On 1 July 1988 I visited Selly Oak hospital, south Birmingham.

Geriatric Patients

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for health how many geriatric patients in the Newcastle district health authority area are waiting for placement in *(a)* geriatric hospitals and *(b)* residential homes.

Mrs. Currie: We do not have information in the precise form requested. Available information is as follows. On 31 March 1988, the latest date for which we have figures, six patients were on the Newcastle district health authority geriatric medicine in-patient waiting list. We do not have figures for the number of patients awaiting admission to residential homes. The hon. Member may wish to consider requesting other information from the health and local authorities concerned.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Frank Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list those districts which are planned to have *(a)* basic screening units and *(b)* specialist assessment teams; and if he will give the latest estimates when each team and each unit will commence service;

(2) if he will list those districts which are planned to have *(a)* mobile screening units and *(b)* static screening units;

(3) if he will list those districts where women are already being called by a computerised system for breast cancer screening; and if he will give the age bands of the women being called.

Mrs. Currie: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) on 1 November 1988 at columns *596-97*.

All family practitioner committees have the necessary computer software to provide screening offices with invitation lists. Precise arrangements to phase the calling of the women aged between 50 and 64 resident in the districts served by the initial screening centres over the next three years will vary from unit to unit.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give, at current prices, the cost of a mobile basic screening unit.

Mrs. Currie: The cost of mobile mammography screening equipment varies in accordance with the complexity of the procedure that it is designed to carry out. Typical costs exclusive of VAT for the mobile trailer, X-ray machine, electricity generator and film handling system would range from £63,000 to £88,000. The cost of the towing vehicle is not included in these figures.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the measures being taken to adapt family practitioner committee computerised call/recall cervical cancer screening programmes to accommodate the breast cancer screening programme.

Mrs. Currie: All family practitioner committees in England and Wales now have the ability to provide health authorities with computerised call/recall facilities to enable them to carry out their breast screening programme.

Nurses (Grading)

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will take steps to ensure that no National Health Service official or manager who holds a contract embodying a provision that confers on its holder financial reward related to financial outturn such that he benefits from low gradings of nurses and midwives is permitted to sit on any appeal tribunal or panel that hears appeals by nurses or midwives against their grading.

Mr. Mellor: No health service officials or managers stand to benefit financially from low gradings of nursing and midwifery staff.

Care in the Community Report

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make a statement on his proposals arising from Sir Roy Griffiths' report on care in the community.

Mr. Mellor: We are continuing to give very careful consideration to Sir Roy's report and to the numerous representations that we have received. We will bring forward our own proposals in due course and are mindful of concern that action should not be unduly delayed.

NHS Employees

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are (i) district general managers and (ii) regional general managers in the National Health Service.

Mr. Mellor: Of the 14 regional general managers 13 are men and one is a woman. The 190 district general managers comprise 182 men and eight women.

NHS Vacancies

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the current level of vacancies for technicians in the National Health Service laboratories;

(2) what is the current level of vacancies for medical secretaries in the National Health Service;

(3) what has been the percentage change in the use of agency staff as medical secretaries in the last six years.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold such information centrally.

Maternity Leave (Nurses)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what maternity leave nurses in the National Health Service are entitled to.

Mr. Mellor: Nurses, along with all other NHS employees, who have more than one year's service are entitled to 18 weeks paid maternity leave. Those with more than two years' service are additionally entitled to unpaid maternity leave until the end of the 29th week after the week of confinement. In all cases, additional unpaid leave may be granted at the discretion of the employing authority.

Nurses

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the average number of years worked in the National Health Service by nurses after qualification.

Mr. Mellor: Recent trends in the numbers of nursing and midwifery staff in post and newly qualified nurses suggest that following qualification each nurse provides 11-12 years full-time service in the NHS.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current level of vacancies for nurses in the National Health Service.

Mr. Mellor: We do not collect information about vacancies centrally. However, a sample survey for the Pay Review Body showed that at 31 March 1987 about 3·5 per cent. of all nursing and midwifery staff posts had been vacant for three months or more.

Hostel and Community Services

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those district health authorities and special health authorities which have set up trusts or charities to run hostel/community services for patients discharged from long-stay hospitals; what are the estimated savings to each authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: We do not routinely collect information of the sort requested. I will write to the hon. Member to let him have such information as we do hold on health authority activity in this field.

War Dead (Disposal)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement regarding the current guidance issued to local authorities regarding the disposal of the dead in war; and if he intends to issue revised guidance;

(2) what reserves of equipment and chemicals are held by his Department for distribution to local authorities to assist in the disposal of the dead in the event of war; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if his Department has carried out or commissioned research into the psychological problems likely to be encountered by those involved in mass burials in the event of war; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what advice is being offered by his Department to London local authorities regarding the disposal of dead bodies in the event of nuclear war;

(5) what discussions have taken place between his Department and religious leaders regarding the disposal of bodies in mass graves in the event of nuclear war; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Government advice concerning the disposal of the dead in war, including nuclear war, is contained in section 10 of the Home Office publication "Emergency Planning Guidance to Local Authorities" issued in 1985. A copy is available in the Library. The "Handbook on Environmental Health" to which reference is made in part 5 of the DHSS health circular (88)31—"Emergency Planning in the NHS: Health Service Responsibilities in Civil Defence"—issued in July 1988, is currently the subject of consultation. This handbook which is concerned with environmental health in war, has been prepared by an outside consultant and it contains advice on the prevention of the spread of disease and the promotion of community health. The handbook includes a chapter dealing with the disposal of the dead and also takes account of the emotional and social stress which might be caused by mass casualties. A copy will be placed in the Library on publication.

There is no central reserve of equipment or chemicals held by the Department to assist in the disposal of the dead. There have been no discussions between leaders of religious denominations and this Department on the disposal of bodies in mass graves.

Women Employees

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement about the employment of women in the National Health Service;

(2) if he will list those district health authorities which provide work place nurseries and specify how many places they provide.

Mr. Mellor: Women make a vital contribution to every aspect of the National Health Service and comprise about 70 per cent. of its work force. We are committed to ensuring that no unnecessary obstacles are placed in their way in terms of their training, career development and the opportunity to deploy to the full their talents, professional skills and expertise. Whilst much has been done in this area, further progress is possible. That is why we agreed to the establishment of the national steering group on equal opportunities for women in the NHS, whose general remit was to consider the personnel policies and procedures necessary to provide equality of opportunity in NHS employment, and in particular to make recommendations for management of the career break. Although the group has yet to report, it has already issued practical guidance direct to health authorities, including advice about the procedures of recruitment and retention, which the then Health Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) publicly welcomed and commended to authorities. Once we have the group's report, which I understand is expected shortly, we shall consider what further action we can take.

We do not hold information about the numbers of workplace nurseries and places available locally within district health authorities centrally.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Action Trust (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any proposals to establish a housing action trust in Nottingham.

Mr. Trippier: No.

Landfill Sites

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any intention of privatising landfill sites controlled by local authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no plans to do so at present. We are considering ways to introduce greater competition into local authorities' waste disposal operations.

Sewers and Water Mains

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been invested in repairs and maintenance of *(a)* the sewer systems and *(b)* the water mains in (i) the Severn Trent water authority area and (ii) Stoke on Trent, in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Moynihan: Information requested by the hon. Member is not held centrally.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what debts are currently attributable to *(a)* the sewer systems and *(b)* the water mains in (i) the Severn Trent water authority and (ii) Stoke on Trent.

Mr. Moynihan: Water authority debt is attributable to the undertaking as a whole, and not allocated by service area.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has of the expenditure needed to bring *(a)* the sewer systems and *(b)* the water mains of (i) the Severn Trent water authority area and (ii) Stoke on Trent up to modern standards.

Mr. Moynihan: Information requested by the hon. Member is not held centrally.

Land Holdings

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish a table showing *(a)* the land holdings and *(b)* their current asset value of the Severn Trent water authority (i) generally and (ii) in Stoke on Trent.

Mr. Moynihan: The net asset value of the authority's land and buildings is shown in its published annual accounts. The other information is not available.

Rating Reform

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each charging authority area, attributing grant income received by precepting authorities under the current grant system to each area in proportion to the aggregate of rateable values in that area *(a)* the estimated rate support grant for 1988-89, *(b)* the estimated amount of revenue support grant which would have been payable in 1988-89 under the proposed new grant system, had the new system been in its first year of operation in 1988-89 with full safety nets and assuming needs assessments at 1988-89 grant-related expenditure levels, *(c)* the estimated amount of revenue support grant payable in 1988-89 under the proposed new grant system after the end of safety nets and assuming needs assessments at 1988-89 grant-related expenditure levels, *(d)* the difference between *(a)* and *(b)*, *(e)* the difference between *(a)* and *(c)* and *(f)* the difference between *(b)* and *(c)* showing aggregates for each figure for each class of charging authority and for each region.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information consistent with the published community charge figures has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each charging authority area, attributing grant income received by precepting authorities under the current grant system to each area in proportion to the aggregate of rateable values in that area *(a)* the estimated revenue from non-domestic rates in 1988-89, *(b)* the estimated amount which would have been raised in revenue by the national non-domestic rate in 1988-89, after the end of transitional arrangements and assuming rateable values at current levels, *(c)* the amount which would have been paid from the national non-domestic rating pool to each area in 1988-89, *(d)* the difference between *(a)* and *(b)*, *(e)* the difference between *(a)* and *(c)* and *(f)* the difference between *(a)* and *(c)* showing aggregates for each figure for each class of charging authority and for each region.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

London Fire and Civil Defence Authority

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to confer powers under section 138 of the Local Government Act 1972 to the London fire and civil defence authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. Earlier this year we considered very carefully the views of the authority on this point and decided that the case had not been made for legislation to confer on them powers under section 138 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Kings Cross Fire

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional resources have been made available to Camden borough council to deal with immediate and longer term problems associated with the Kings Cross fire.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Additional resources have not been made available to Camden borough council for this purpose.

"Tidy Britain"

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will identify by location and type the 19 experimental projects currently underway as a result of the "Tidy Britain" initiative; and what involvement is being provided by local authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The experimental projects currently being carried out by the "Tidy Britain" group fall into the following categories and locations:

Transport——Rail
  Liverpool to Southport line
  London Bridge to Sevenoaks line
  Glasgow to Motherwell line

Major roads
  A38, 10 mile section from Bristol city centre northwards.
  A1 Lincolnshire section.

Service areas
  A1—Grantham services area
  M6—Keele motorway services

London Underground
  Elephant and Castle station
  Dollis Hill station
  Hampstead station
  Turnham Green station
  Charing Cross station
  Leicester Square station
  Westminster station

Commercial areas——Capital high street
  Bond street

Provincial high streets
  Nottingham
  Nelson
  Doncaster

Industrial estate
Gateshead, adjoining Garden Festival site

Local Government——Peripheral city
Leeds—three areas around city centre

Litter Act enforcement (North East)
Seven district councils in Northumbria:
Blythe
Tynedale
North Tyneside
Sedgefield
Middlesbrough
Hartlepool
Durham

County litter plans development
Lancashire
Buckinghamshire
Berkshire
Oxfordshire

Review of the Community Environment Programme
Wigan
Llanelli
Bridlington
Dunfermline
Rhondda

Tourism
Yorkshire Dales
Forest of Dean
Tower of London
Beaches in East Anglia and Wales (Glamorgan coast)

Special events
The Derby
The Bath and West Show
Cowal Highland Gathering

Local authorities are involved in the majority of projects. The form of their involvement varies with the type of project.

Water Authorities (Pensions)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements the Government are making to ensure that water authority employees can continue to be members of an index-linked pension scheme.

Mr. Howard: Each authority is offering a "mirror image scheme", so called because it will offer the same benefits, including full index linking, for the same level of contribution by employees as the local government superannuation scheme. The water authorities are preparing trust deeds for the mirror image schemes, and the Secretary of State will not approve these until he is satisfied that the commitment to match the local government superannuation scheme has been met. The mirror image scheme will be open to employees who stay in the local government superannuation scheme until the transfer date, when the assets, rights and liabilities of water authorities, except for those being vested in the NRA, are vested in their successor companies. As an additional alternative, most water authorities are offering employees new water pension schemes with a different mix of benefits which includes limited index linking; these new water pension schemes will continue to be available after the transfer date.

Employees will be able to choose whether to leave their accrued pension rights in the water authorities superannuation fund, which will in future be administered by the National Rivers Authority, or to transfer accrued rights to the mirror image schemes or the new water pension schemes being set up by the water authorities. The pension rights of existing pensioners, and those who have left or choose to leave their accrued rights in the fund will also be preserved. Clause 160 of the Water Bill would give the Secretary of State a power to pay into the fund and a duty to ensure that the fund can meet its liabilities.

The Government will introduce further regulations under the Superannuation Act 1972 to make index-linked increases a liability of the fund and to make an appropriate distribution of the resources already in the water authorities superannuation fund between that part of the fund which will continue under the management of the NRA, and the pension schemes run by the industry so that these schemes will be funded to meet both basic pension liabilities and those index-linked increase liabilities that have accrued up till the date of transfer of members into those schemes.

The Water research centre, the Water Authorities Association, the Water Industry Training Association, British Water International Ltd., the International Association on Water Pollution Research and Control, and the International Water Supply Association will also be able to participate in these arrangements.

Enterprise and Planning Zones

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provision he proposes to make for the environmental assessment of projects in enterprise zones and simplified planning zones.

Mr. Howard: Department of the Environment Circular 24/88 (Welsh Office 48/88) and Scottish Development Department Circular 26/88, published today, explain that the Secretaries of State will use their powers to ensure that future enterprise zone and simplified planning zone schemes include provisions which exclude from the planning permissions granted by the schemes any developments which would require environmental assessment under the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988 or the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 1988.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kurdish Refugees

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Iraq concerning the treatment of Kurdish people.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have repeatedly expressed our concern for the treatment of the Kurdish community in Iraq and the need to respect their human rights.

Alex Lein

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make urgent representations to the Soviet Government to allow Alex Lein to join his sister in Israel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We regularly make representations to the Soviet authorities on behalf of those, such as Alex Lein, refused exit visas to allow them to leave the Soviet Union. We raised Mr. Lein's case most recently at the bilateral consultations on human rights in Moscow on 23 June and will continue to raise it at every appropriate opportunity, including during Mr. Gorbachev's forthcoming visit, until he is allowed to emigrate.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 28 November 1988

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Cathedrals (Maintenance Costs)

77. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, how much money the Church Commissioners expect cathedral authorities to raise for the maintenance of their fabric and towards their running costs; how much is contributed to each of these costs by the Church Commissioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: Each cathedral is independently responsible for raising the money required for the maintenance and repair of the cathedral's fabric. The Commissioners give the cathedral authorities some assistance with staff salaries and clergy housing.

PRIME MINISTER

Surplus Food and Wine

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the impact on world food prices of the European Economic Community's disposal of food and wine at very low prices; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. The Montreal mid-term GATT meeting is taking place the following week and will be addressing agriculture as a key element in negotiations.

Excise Duties

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the proposal by the Commission to harmonise excise duties.

The Prime Minister: No. I understand that this matter will next be discussed at the meeting of the Economic and Finance Council (ECOFIN), on 12 December.

Economic League

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if she will issue instructions that no Government contracts be given to companies which subscribed to the Economic League.

The Prime Minister: No. The Government will continue to award their contracts on the basis of value for money.

Design Seminar

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made in implementing the 25 suggestions for action which she made to the design seminar in 1982.

The Prime Minister: The first design seminar at 10 Downing street held in January 1982 marked the start of a substantial programme of Government activity to promote design awareness.

Recommendations made by senior industrialists, designers and educationists at the seminar fell into two broad themes: industry and education. These have been the centre of our design policy and objectives.

Our records show that 31 separate recommendations were made at the 1982 seminar. Of these, 27 could be said to be addressed to the Government or agencies close to them (for example the Design Council). Of those 27, activities and initiatives have been pursued in respect of 23.

Examples are:

design consultancy support for over 6,000 projects in small and medium size firms;

measures to improve and assist the teaching of design in primary and secondary schools;

measures to improve design education at tertiary level and introduce design modules into management and business courses;

major awareness campaigns aimed at industry involving DTI Ministers;

encouraging closer collaboration between the teaching of product design and engineering design;

assisting a greater volume of research and reports on design issues;

support for a wide variety of non-Government bodies to help in the task of spreading design awareness.

At a second design seminar I held in January 1987 our efforts were welcomed by a similar audience who urged the Government to continue with them. We have done so.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Mozambique

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is *(a)* the estimated expenditure on aid to Mozambique in the current year, *(b)* the breakdown of that expenditure by programme and project and *(c)* the degree of priority currently being given to Mozambique within the Government's overall aid programme.

Mr. Chris Patten: Gross British bilateral aid to Mozambique in 1987, the latest year for which figures are available, was £22·8 million, including expenditure on Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) projects in Mozambique. The main elements were programme aid (£5·2 million), project aid (£5·1 million) disaster relief (£4·6 million) and food aid (£4·5 million). Mozambique was our seventh largest bilateral recipient last year.

Vietnam

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what is his policy on the provision of development aid and food aid to Vietnam.

Mr. Chris Patten: We do not provide bilateral development aid or food aid to Vietnam.

Through the European Community we are contributing our share (about £540,000) of the cost of emergency food aid for Vietnam supplied this year.

Development Assistance

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the United

Kingdom's net official development assistance as a percentage of gross national product for each calendar year from 1978 to 1987; and what is his estimate for 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information for the years 1978 to 1987 is as follows:

	Per cent.
1978	0·45
1979	0·51
1980	0·35
1981	0·42
1982	0·37
1983	0·35
1984	0·33
1985	0·33
1986	0·31
1987	0·28

It is not possible accurately to predict the percentages of gross national product which net official development assistance will constitute in 1988 or 1989.

International Development Association

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will propose to the World Bank that all funds from the International Development Association should be free rather than loans.

Mr. Chris Patten: No. The International Development Association lends at no interest on highly concessional terms for 35 to 40 years and repayments are recycled to increase the funding available for new lending. Moreover, agreement on the present lending terms for IDA was an essential element in achieving the last replenishment level of well over $12 billion.

Aid Programme (Cost)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the expected cost to the aid programme of *(a)* Britain's contribution to the International Monetary Fund enhanced structural adjustment facility and *(b)* the Chancellor of the Exchequer's debt initiative in each of the years 1988-89 to 1990-91 inclusive for which an estimate has been made by his Department.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer my right hon. Friend to the answers I gave the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) on 25 November, at column 13.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will propose to the European Community that all past aid to the poorest countries be converted to grants and all new aid in the form of a gift.

Mr. Chris Patten: Most European Community aid to the poorest countries is already given as grants. Loans are provided generally to the better-off developing countries, and on generous terms.

Repayments on past loans provided under the European development funds for the poorest ACP countries have recently been recycled as a contribution to the Community's special programme in favour of low-income, debt-distressed countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will consider asking both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to adopt the six guidelines agreed by Ministers at the development assistance committee meeting in December 1987.

Mr. Chris Patten: As the guidelines agreed at the development assistance committee propose, the IMF and World Bank are paying increasing attention to designing structural adjustment programmes with safeguards to protect the poor. The World Bank is increasing support for special compensatory lending programmes in a number of countries in order to preserve basic social services during periods of adjustment. We welcome these developments. But the decisions on how to implement adjustment programmes, and how to protect vulnerable groups, must ultimately be for the Governments of the countries concerned.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mental Illness (Prisons)

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the findings of the study by the Institute of Psychiatry, London on *(a)* schizophrenia and *(b)* mental illness in the prison population; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As I said in my reply to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) on 25 January, at column *1*, this important study, which is intended to provide a sound basis on which the Department is able to consider the further development of its policies on mentally disordered offenders in the prison system, will take three years. The report from the Institute of Psychiatry is expected in October 1990.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new arrangements have been made for patients in prison suffering from mental illness to be assessed by National Health Service medical staff prior to release back into the community; what has been the extent of such assessments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The desirability of developing such arrangements for facilitating the continuity of care of a mentally disordered inmate on release from prison was included in the recommendations of a joint Home Office/Department of Health working group and accepted by the Government. Progress is as follows.

The Departments are in discussion about guidance to regional and district health authorities and also with the professions on how this ought to be given effect. Revised prison department instructions and a model letter for use by prison medical officers, both presently in draft, will provide an administrative framework for NHS medical staff to be invited to visit an inmate and to discuss his case with the responsible medical officer.

Mentally Disordered Offenders

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made as to whether the courts are fully aware of the non-custodial options open to them, particularly their powers of remand to hospital for report or treatment under sections 35 and 36 of the Mental Health Act 1983, and of the facilities available in the health system; what trends in exercising such options have taken place since the report by the director of prison medical services on mentally disordered offenders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Statistics on the extent to which courts have made use of their powers under sections 35 and 36 of the 1983 Act since the publication of the report of the interdepartmental working group on mentally disordered offenders will be available in due course. We are also considering research into the remand prison population, with particular reference to the procedures for courts to obtain medical reports and the working of these provisions.

A handbook for the courts on the treatment of offenders already describes their powers under the 1983 Act, and we are preparing further guidance to the courts and other criminal justice services.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what information he has as to how many of those convicted of crimes in England and Wales in each of the last two years had previously been admitted to National Health Service mental illness hospitals with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses;

(2) how many of those convicted of crimes in England and Wales in 1987 have ever been admitted to National Health Service mental illness hospitals and units with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses.

Mr. John Patten: Information is not collected centrally about the medical history of persons found guilty by the courts.

Immigration Detention Centres

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place to stop Securicor staff at immigration centres and on immigration escort duty, from giving to outside agencies names and other information about those in detention and being escorted, and those associated with them.

Mr. Renton: Securicor staff are instructed to regard all information provided for the performance of their duties and all other information gained by them in the course of their duties as confidential and not to be discussed with any unauthorised person.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what undertakings have been given by Group 4 on rights of appeal for existing Securicor staff employed at immigration detention centres against a refusal to employ them by the Group 4 security company.

Mr. Renton: Any such arrangements would be matters for the companies concerned and not for my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will cancel the contract recently awarded to the Group 4 security company to administer immigration detention centres and provide escorts.

Mr. Renton: No.

Criminal Justice Act

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy, when laying a commencement order for section 35 and 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, to provide that it should cover all cases decided since Royal Assent.

Mr. John Patten: No.

Passport Office

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will implement the recommendations of the Rayner efficiency scrutiny report to increase the number of staff working in the passport office by a minimum of 326.

Mr. Renton: No such recommendation appears in the report of the 1982 Rayner scrutiny of the Passport Office. The trade union's claim for 326 additional permanent staff derives from an outdated formula for matching staff resources to peaks in demand. This bears no relevance to present-day requirements, particularly in the light of computerisation. Staffing levels at the United Kingdom passport offices are closely monitored, and have in general kept in step with the increasing demand for passports. Officials are in consultation with the trade unions about them.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the increase of the number of staff working in the passport offices in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Glasgow, and *(c)* Edinburgh, for each year since 1982.

Mr. Renton: The information for the Glasgow passport office, which is the only one in Scotland, is given in the table.

Year (At 1 April)	*Staff Complement*	*Staff in Post*		
		Permanent	*Casual*	*Total*
1982	90	85	14	99
1983	89	89	11	100
1984	[1]83	85	6	91
1985	83	79	9	88
1986	83	83	11	94
1987	83	84	9	93
1988	83	82·5	21	103·5

[1] Six posts transferred to Belfast in June 1983 together with work on postal applications from Northern Ireland.

The recently computerised Glasgow office is gradually taking on the work of dealing with postal applications from the London area and by mid-1989 its complement will have increased by some 100 posts.

Television

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what national and international measures he is seeking to guarantee that television companies and the interests they represent will not interfere in the free and open political process once companies are allowed to transmit their programmes from other countries into the United Kingdom;

(2) what international agreements Her Majesty's Government are seeking to enter into for the safeguarding

of the quality, standards and balance of the variety of television programmes once satellite and other television systems produced or broadcast from abroad are allowed into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Renton: We hope that, following the successful outcome of a conference of Council of Europe Broadcasting Ministers in Stockholm last week which I attended, it will be possible within the next two or three months to finalise work on a draft Council of Europe convention on transfrontier television. This will establish a European code of minimum standards for transfrontier services, whether transmitted terrestrially or by satellite or cable, covering both programme content and advertising. The convention will ensure that programmes meet certain fundamental requirements on matters such as taste, decency, objectivity and balance. Discussions are also continuing in the European Community on a draft directive on broadcasting which is intended to provide a limited harmonisation of member states' law on advertising, the protection of children and copyright in the broadcasting field. It will remain open to individual countries to impose on their own broadcasters stricter requirements than those contained in the convention of directive if they so choose, and we have recently set out our own proposals for future broadcasting legislation in our White Paper "Broadcasting in the 90s: Competition, Choice and Quality."

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list all the representatives of *(a)* television viewers' associations, *(b)* education authorities, *(c)* experts and *(d)* members of unions representing television workers, consulted by his Department prior to the publication of his White Paper on broadcasting;

(2) if he will list all the Scottish journalists, broadcasters, producers, entertainers, presenters and administrators with experience in television consulted by him prior to the publication of his White Paper on broadcasting.

Mr. Renton: The development of the proposals in the White Paper was informed by the many representations received and by the lively public debate on broadcasting matters. Representatives of the groups mentioned, including those involved in broadcasting in Scotland, have played an important part in this process. The Government would welcome any comments on its proposals by 28 February 1989.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specific research was carried out and information gathered by his Department regarding the comparative standards and quality of the present television systems of Australia, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, prior to the publication of his White Paper on broadcasting.

Mr. Renton: I made visits to the United States, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Federal Republic of Germany specifically to study the broadcasting systems in those countries. During the visits I had discussions with broadcasters and others about the nature of the services provided and the arrangements concerning the quality and standards of programming. More generally, we have kept in touch with developments in other countries through bilateral contacts, discussions in fora such as the Council of Europe and the European Communities, and by studying the available relevant material.

Police Training Centres

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reconsider the decision to develop additional accommodation at the police training centre at Ryton rather than at the district police training centre at Cwmbran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Police Training Council, whose membership includes representatives of the police service, local authorities and the Home Office, unanimously agreed at its meeting on 17 November, inter alia, that Ryton police district training centre should be the main site for the provision of additional police probationer training places. We do not propose to reconsider that decision. Some redevelopment at Cwmbran is currently under way to provide an additional 39 training places.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to improve the staffing levels at Wakefield prison in order to enable the Wednesday communion service to be reintroduced, and to enable category A prisoners to attend the service in the prison chapel on Sunday evenings.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The governor and chaplaincy can offer a full programme of religious activities, including a monthly Wednesday communion service. Providing extra discipline officers to allow category A prisoners to attend chapel twice on Sunday would be disproportionately costly.

Identity Cards

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Association of Chief Police Officers on the introduction of an obligatory national identity card; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have asked the Association of Chief Police Officers for a considered and updated view on the reintroduction of a national identity card system, and we are awaiting their response.

Electronic Surveillance

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future role of electronic surveillance in the handling of offenders.

Mr. John Patten: The Government have not reached any final conclusions on the role of electronic monitoring in the handling of offenders. The Green Paper, "Punishment, Custody and the Community," (Cm. 424) suggests a possible use in helping to enforce curfews. This will be considered in the context of the other proposals in the Green Paper. Meanwhile, we are setting up a pilot project using electronic monitoring on unconvicted volunteers who have been remanded on bail. This will give us practical experience of the benefits and limitations of monitoring.

"Punishment, Custody and the Community"

Mr. Alton : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the introduction of supervision and restriction orders, as outlined in the Green Paper, "Punishment, Custody and the Community."

Mr. John Patten: We have invited comments on the Green Paper proposals by 31 January 1989 and we shall consider them carefully.

Magistrates and Probation Officers (Liaison)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the liaison and dialogue between magistrates and probation officers.

Mr. John Patten: This is indeed important. It is one of the key themes of the paper, "Tackling Offending: An Action Plan," which was issued by the Home Office in August to promote community-based punishments for young adult offenders. It asks the probation service to consult the courts on local "action plans" and suggests that communication between the probation service and the courts should be improved especially in the areas of social inquiry report writing and content of supervision programmes. We hope that local action plans will take effect next year.

The Home Office has recently taken part in discussions with the Magistrates' Association on working relations between the probation service and the magistrates' courts and on the work of probation liaison committees. Guidelines on both these subjects have been adopted by the Magistrates' Association as a result.

Lunar House

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extra staff have been employed at Lunar house since 19 May; and in what capacities.

Mr. Renton: In my reply to the hon. Members for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) and for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) on 19 May, at column *533*, I said that vigorous steps would be taken to recruit some 100 additional staff for the immigration and nationality department at Lunar house during the current financial year. As a result of these efforts, a net additional total of 83 staff have so far been recruited for general administrative work.

I also said on 19 May, at column *533*, that we planned to recruit more than 100 staff outside London to deal with the influx of citizenship applications. We have recruited 121 staff to man the new nationality office which was opened on 22 August at Liverpool specifically for this work.

Student Demonstration

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to how many *(a)* police vans, *(b)* police officers, *(c)* boats, *(d)* helicopters and *(e)* horses were deployed by the Commissioner of Police in responding to the demonstration of students in and around Westminster on the afternoon of Thursday 24 November; and what was the cost to public funds of the operation.

Mr. Hurd: I understand from the Commissioner that the information is as follows:

	Numbers
Police vans	36
Police officers	1,500
Boats	2
Helicopters	1
Horses	47

I shall reply on the matter of additional costs as soon as possible.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to which officer was in overall charge of police strategy and tactics on the afternoon of Thursday 24 November in deciding the police response to the demonstration of students in and around Westminster, and as to who gave the order for a charge of mounted police to take place across Westminster bridge and as to what prior warning was given to demonstrators before this charge occurred.

Mr. Hurd: I understand from the Commissioner that the senior officer in overall charge at the scene of the demonstration was the deputy assistant commissioner of No. 8 area. It was the commander (operations) No. 8 area who authorised the advance of mounted officers on Westminster bridge. He did so only after repeated announcements by megaphone that this action would be taken if the demonstrators failed to disperse.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the establishment of the Nottingham city technical college will lead to the closure of any maintained secondary schools in Nottingham.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Nottingham city technology college has a strictly defined catchment area, served by a number of maintained secondary schools. It is unlikely that its establishment will lead any of these to close although it may reduce the demand for places.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the latest total estimate of the amount of public funds necessary to establish the Nottingham city technological college; and what is the latest total estimate of private investment available to establish this city technology college.

Mrs. Rumbold: The cash limit for capital expenditure on the Nottingham city technology college is £9·05 million. My right hon. Friend has agreed exceptionally to underwrite up to 85 per cent. of this figure. However, sponsorship of £1·6 million has now been pledged by the private sector and I am sure that more will be raised.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what deadline has been set for companies wishing to sponsor the Nottingham city technology college to indicate their financial commitment.

Mrs. Rumbold: All CTCs will aim to stimulate a continuing private sector investment.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received following the announcement of the proposed establishment of Dixons city technology college.

Mrs. Rumbold: None.

Top-up Loans

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will set out how much a single student living in private rented accommodation outside London would gain or lose as a consequence of his proposals in the White Paper, "Top-up loans for Students", Cm. 520, to abolish student entitlements to welfare benefits and introduce top up loans, assuming rents of *(a)* £20 per week, *(b)* £25 per week, *(c)* £30 per week and *(d)* £35 per week, taking the assumptions of grant levels as set out in the White Paper, paragraph 3.8;

(2) if he will set out how much a single student living in private rented accommodation in London would gain or lose as a consequence of his proposals in the White Paper, "Top-up loans for Students", Cm. 520, to abolish student entitlements to welfare benefits and introduce top up loans, assuming rents of *(a)* £35 per week, *(b)* £40 per week, *(c)* £45 per week and *(d)* £50 per week, taking the assumptions of grant levels as set out in the White Paper paragraph 3·8.

Mr. Jackson: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible, and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, how many students will be *(a)* better off and *(b)* worse off as a result of his proposals to introduce top-up student loans in 1990-91 and to freeze parental contributions and the level of student grants at their 1990-91 level, as well as abolishing entitlements to welfare benefits.

Mr. Jackson: The White Paper, "Top-up Loans for Students", includes illustrative figures for the value of the top-up loans in 1990-91. On that basis, the great majority of students affected by the top-up loan facility would be better off. The small numbers whose benefit claims would have exceeded the top-up loan facility will be able to seek further resources from the access funds.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the total amounts to be spent on student grants in the year 2007-8 assuming the freezing of the parental contribution scales and the level of grants at their 1990-91 levels as set out in paragraph 3·8 of the White Paper Cm. 520 and increases in average earnings of *(a)* 7·5 per cent. per annum, *(b)* 5 per cent. per annum and *(c)* 3 per cent. per annum.

Mr. Jackson: Expenditure on student grants in the year 2007-8 will depend on the rate of inflation between now and then. On the White Paper's assumption of a constant 3 per cent. rate of inflation after 1990-91, expenditure in 2007-8 on mandatory awards for maintenance for students in England and Wales will be £350 million in 1990-91 prices compared to forecast expenditure of £588 million in 1990-91. Expenditure on discretionary awards, and on the proposed access funds, will be additional. Since the grant and the parental contribution will remain in fixed proportion, the figures do not vary with the assumption about average earnings. The parental contribution scale will be reindexed annually so that after 1990 parents whose income rises at the same rate as the earnings trend will pay the same contribution from year to year in cash terms.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how the figures of £420 per year and £310 in the final year of study as top up loan facilities for students set out in the White Paper Cm. 520, paragraph 3.8, were calculated; and what assumptions were made in arriving at those figures.

Mr. Jackson: The maximum top-up loan facilities proposed in the White Paper have been set at levels which will provide students with additional resources and make it unnecessary for them to look for supplementary support from the social security system. The lower maxima for the final year have been calculated to cover 38 weeks—the average duration of term time and short vacations—instead of 52.

Student Grants

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of *(a)* the reduction in the value of the student grant since 1979 in real terms, *(b)* the current value of travel costs reimbursement, had they been retained at 1979 levels, *(c)* what would be the level of the minimum maintenance award at 1979 levels and *(d)* the average increase in parental contributions between 1979 and 1988.

Mr. Jackson: The information is as follows:

(a) The rate of maintenance grant for mandatory award-holders studying outside London and away from the parental home has fallen by about 13 per cent. since the 1979-80 academic year.

(b) The level of reimbursable travel expenses was not specified; amounts varied according to students' circumstances.

(c) The minimum maintenance award payable in 1979-80 would be £614 at September 1988 prices.

(d) The average parental contribution in the 1988-89 academic year is forecast to be 100 per cent. above the average contribution in 1979-80 at September 1988 prices.

Mature Students

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many applications were made by mature students for entry to courses in higher education in each year since 1979; how many were accepted; and what percentage this represented in each of those years.

Mr. Jackson: The numbers of United Kingdom domiciled applicants and acceptances aged 21 and over through the Universities Central Council on Admissions scheme have been as follows.

Information on applications to public sector courses is not available.

United Kingdom domiciled applicants and acceptances aged 21 and over (Universities)

	Applicants	*Acceptances*	*Percentages accepted*
1979	17,893	6,956	38·9
1980	17,776	7,122	40·1
1981	16,061	6,575	40·9
1982	15,254	5,742	37·6

	Applicants	*Acceptances*	*Percentages accepted*
1983	15,513	5,590	36·0
1984	16,534	6,249	37·8
1985	17,669	7,072	40·0
1986	18,505	7,839	42·4
1987	19,117	8,436	44·1

University Applicants

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many university applicants there were in each year since 1979; how many candidates were finally accepted in each of those years; and what percentage this represented in each of those years.

Mr. Jackson: Applicants and acceptances through the Universities Central Council on Admissions scheme for universities in the United Kingdom were as follows:

Academic year of entry	*Applicants*	*Acceptances*	*Percentage accepted*
1979	166,362	82,398	49·5
1980	168,354	84,695	50·3
1981	167,096	80,341	48·1
1982	171,496	77,752	45·3
1983	172,738	74,860	43·3
1984	173,674	77,431	44·6
1985	176,553	82,889	46·9
1986	173,779	84,524	48·6
1987	176,246	86,546	49·1

Until 1982, applications for places in the university of Aberdeen, and until 1985 those for the universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde were partly outside the UCCA scheme. The earlier figures are, therefore, not strictly comparable with the later ones because of changes in the number of institutions within the scheme.

Students (Statistics)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of students in *(a)* universities, *(b)* PSHE institutions and *(c)* all higher education institutions, from social group III M, social group IV and social group V, for each year since 1979, and list these figures as a percentage of the total number of students of known social group in each sector.

Mr. Jackson: The numbers and percentages of United Kingdom domiciled candidates accepted through the Universities Central Council on Admissions for entry to United Kingdom universities whose social class background is known are shown in the table.

Similar information is not collected by the Polytechnic Central Admissions System, but a sample survey of young people attempting examinations qualifying them for HE entry in 1985 indicated that about 26 per cent. of young entrants to PSHE institutions were from social classes III M, IV and V.

UCCA accepted home candidates

				Academic years				
	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Number of (Thousands)								
III M skilled manual	10·1	8·3	8·0	7·8	8·2	8·9	8·7	9·2
IV partly skilled	3·2	2·8	3·2	3·8	4·1	4·6	4·8	4·7
V unskilled	0·7	0·7	0·6	0·7	0·7	0·8	0·8	0·8
Total all known social class	72·1	67·2	66·5	63·0	65·8	69·8	69·8	71·4
Percentage of								
III M skilled manual	14·0	12·3	12·2	12·4	12·4	12·7	12·5	12·9
IV partly skilled	4·4	4·2	4·9	[illegible]	6·2	6·6	6·9	6·6
V unskilled	1·0	1·0	0·9	[illegible]	1·1	1·2	1·2	1·1

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* the age distribution of students in *(a)* further and *(b)* higher education according to the folowing ranges: 18 to 21 years, 22 to 25 years, 26 to 35 years, 35 to 50 years and 50 plus years;

(2) at the latest available date, how many people in Great Britain aged 16 years or over were in *(a)* schools, *(b)* sixth-form colleges, *(c)* further education colleges, *(d)* polytechnics, *(e)* universities and *(f)* other educational establishments, separating them by age into single years from 16 to 20 years and in bands aged 21 to 24 years, 25 to 29 years, 30 to 39 years, 40 to 49 years and 50 years and over.

Mr. Jackson: The readily available information is as follows. Sixth-form colleges are included in the figures for schools.

Numbers of pupils/students continuing their education aged 16 and over: United Kingdom, 1986-87
Home students (thousands)

				Age at 31 August 1986				
	16	*17*	*18*	*Total 16 to 18*	*19 to 20*	*21 to 24*	*25 and over*	*All students*
Full-time and sandwich students								
Schools[1]	282	174	24	480	3	—	—	483
Further education[2]	148	114	57	318	31	20	40	409
Higher education in further education establishments	—	4	38	42	110	83	48	283
of which polytechnics[3]	—	2	25	27	71	54	27	179
Universities	—	5	45	50	119	76	28	273
Total full-time and sandwich students[1]	430	296	164	890	263	179	116	1,448
of which higher education	1	8	83	92	229	159	76	556

	Age at 31 August 1986							
	16	17	18	Total 16 to 18	19 to 20	21 to 24	25 and over	All students
Part-time students								
Higher education courses								
University (excluding Open University)	—	—	—	—	1	6	37	45
Open University[4]	—	—	—	—	—	5	74	80
Polytechnics (England and Wales)	—	—	1	2	7	16	31	56
Other higher education	—	1	9	9	30	42	93	174
Total part-time higher education[5]	—	1	10	12	39	69	235	354
Further education[6]	212	172	183	567	224	469	1,861	3,121
Total part-time students	212	174	192	579	263	539	2,096	3,476

Source: Education statistics for the United Kingdom, 1988 edition (pre-publication extracts).

[1] Schools data for Scotland relate to 1987-88.

[2] Including 6,055 students (4,598 men) in polytechnics (and central institutions in Scotland).

[3] Including central institutions in Scotland.

[4] Provisional. Excluding some 1,300 students for whom data by age are not available.

[5] Excluding 9[illegible]100 (provisional) students enrolled on nursing and paramedical courses at Department of Health and Social Services establishments.

[6] Including 11,084 students (5,561 men) in polytechnics in England and Wales. Including estimated age detail for 1,663,000 students aged 16 years or more in adult education centres; excluding youth clubs and centres, 77,000 in 1984-85 (England). Excluding 531,000 (provisional) students on courses run by responsible bodies for whom age detail was not available.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the total number of home full-time and sandwich students in higher education in each year since 1979; what has been the total full-time equivalent number of part-time students in higher education in each year since 1979; and what has been the total number of home full-time entrants to unversities in each year since 1979.

Mr. Jackson: The information required is shown in the following table.

Student numbers—Academic year beginning in

Thousands

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Higher education United Kingdom domiciled									
Full-time and sandwich	510·1	520·4	541·5	553·1	565·1	573·3	583·5	596·1	608·7
Part-time	267·7	280·8	290·0	296·6	306·2	308·5	325·8	348·9	359·5
Full-time equivalent[1] of part-time	93·7	98·3	101·5	103·8	107·2	108·0	114·0	122·1	125·7
United Kingdom domiciled entrants to University									
Undergraduates	75·7	77·4	74·0	71·5	69·2	70·5	70·3	70·7	72·5

[1] Defined as 35 per cent. of part-time students.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the age participation index for students in full-time advanced further education in each country in the European Community.

Mr. Jackson: The readily available information as follows:

New entrants[1] to higher education

Country[2] (main ages on entry)	*Latest year*	*[3]Participation rate (percentage)*
Denmark (18-20)	1985	35
France (18-20)	1985	32
Germany, West (19-21)	1985	25
Greece[4]	1984	38
Ireland[4]	1985	35
Italy (19-21)	1986	25
Netherlands (18-20)	1985	38
Portugal[4]	1984	14
Spain (18-20)	1985	31
United Kingdom[6] (18-21)	1986	32

[1] Includes full-time and part-time students entering higher education for the first time ie excluding postgraduate students and others already having a qualification in higher education. Not all other countries may adhere to this general definition.

[2] Compatible information is not available for Luxembourg since most higher education is undertaken abroad. Ireland figures partly estimated; data for Belgium war not available.

[3] To aid comparison and overcome the problem of the varying lengths of courses in different countries the participation rate used is the percentage of all new entrants (defined above) to a derived relevant single year group. The latter is calculated by taking the total populations for the ages providing at least 70 per cent. of the new entrants and dividing by the number of ages involved. For the United Kingdom this is the population of ages 18 to 21 divided by 4, OECD recommend this procedure.

[4] Main ages on entry unavailable.

[5] Includes new entrants to postgraduate courses.

[6] Excludes the private sector and students from abroad. Includes nursing and paramedical students at Health Department establishments.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the latest progress in research into schizophrenia.

Mr. Jackson: The Medical Research Council's schizophrenia and allied conditions committee has reviewed the current state of research and has recently published its findings and recommendations. A copy of the committee's "Research into Schizophrenia" is held in the Library. The council's neurosciences and mental health board is now considering the recommendations.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much of its 1987-88 budget the

Medical Research Council spent on research on *(a)* mental health and *(b)* schizophrenia; and what percentage these figures represent of the Medical Research Council's total budget.

Mr. Jackson: I understand that in the last financial year, 1987-88, the Medical Research Council's expenditure on research specifically into mental health (including addiction) was £10·4 million, which represents 8 per cent. of its overall budget. The council's expenditure on schizophrenia was £461,000, or 0·3 per cent. of its budget. The MRC is also funding a range of other research which may be of relevance to mental health and schizophrenia.

Further Education

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* tables showing the proportion of pupils who remain in full-time education after it has ceased to be compulsory, broken down by each local education authority area, by sex, by ages 16, 17, and 18 years, by type of school or college, maintained school, further education college, private school, and so on, for the latest available year and for each of the preceding 10 years, together with aggregate totals.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The following table sets out the percentage of 16 to 18 age groups staying on in full-time education and on YTS in 1975, 1987 and 1988.

Disaggregated information in respect of individual local education authorities will be published in a statistical bulletin early in the new year.

Percentage of the age-group[1,2] in full-time education or on YTS in 1975, 1987 and 1988[3] (England)

	Men			*Women*			*All*		
	1975	*1987*	*1988(P)*	*1975*	*1987*	*1988(P)*	*1975*	*1987*	*1988(P)*
All 16 year olds									
In full-time education									
School[4]	26	28	29	26	30	31	26	29	30
Further/higher education[5]	9	12	13	12	19	20	11	16	17
All	36	41	42	38	49	51	37	45	47
YTS[6]	0	30	28	0	22	20	0	26	24
All 17 year olds									
In full-time education									
School[4]	18	19	19	17	19	19	17	19	19
Further/higher education[5]	7	10	11	9	16	16	8	13	14
All	25	29	30	25	35	35	25	32	33
YTS[6]	0	11	25	0	8	16	0	10	21
All 18 year olds									
In full-time education									
School[4]	2	3	3	1	2	2	2	3	2
Further/higher education[5]	12	15	15	9	15	15	10	15	15
All	14	18	18	10	17	18	12	17	18
YTS[6]	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
All 16-18 year olds									
In full-time education									
School[4]	16	16	17	15	17	17	15	17	17
Further/higher education[5]	9	12	13	10	16	17	10	14	15
All	25	28	30	24	33	35	25	31	32
YTS[6]	0	13	18	0	10	12	0	12	15

(P) Provisional figures.

[1] Age as at 31 August of the preceding year.

[2] Some 10 per cent. of the age group attend evening classes. The available data do not allow analysis of these by day-time activity and therefore evening activity has not been incorporated into the table.

[3] Each year given relates to the appropriate academic year; for example, 1988 relates to 1987-88.

[4] Pupils attending maintained, independent and special schools are included.

[5] Full-time and sandwich including higher education but excluding private further education. Excludes those on YTS within colleges.

[6] Including those in YOP prior to 1985 and those in further education establishments attending YTS/YOP courses.

Nursery Education

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been *(a)* the total number and *(b)* the proportion of three and four-year-olds in (i) nursery schools, (ii) nursery classes, and (iii) primary classes for each year since 1958.

Mr. Butcher: The total number and proportion of three and four-year-olds in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes and infant classes in primary schools in England each year since 1980 was as follows:

Comparable information prior to 1980 is not available.

	Number of pupils aged 3 and 4 (thousands)			*Percentage of the estimated population aged 3 and 4*		
January each year	*Nursery schools*	*Nursery classes*	*Infant classes*	*Nursery schools*	*Nursery classes*	*Infant classes*
1980	40·6	150·2	213·3	3·7	13·8	19·6
1981	40·1	154·5	206·4	3·8	14·5	19·4
1982	40·5	165·6	201·2	3·8	15·4	18·7
1983	42·2	179·4	210·2	3·7	15·7	18·4
1984	42·2	191·4	236·3	3·5	16·0	19·7
1985	42·6	199·8	245·5	3·6	16·7	20·5
1986	42·2	204·7	235·9	3·6	17·3	20·0

	Number of pupils aged 3 and 4 (thousands)			*Percentage of the estimated population aged 3 and 4*		
January each year	*Nursery schools*	*Nursery classes*	*Infant classes*	*Nursery schools*	*Nursery classes*	*Infant classes*
1987	42·8	208·4	240·4	3·6	17·7	20·4
1988	42·5	214·7	248·2	3·6	18·0	20·9

WALES

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many current occupants of National Health Service hospital and unit beds in Wales have a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses; and what those figures are as a percentage of *(a)* mental and *(b)* all beds in Wales.

Mr. Grist: It is not known how many of the current occupants of National Health Service hospital and unit beds in Wales have a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses; however, it is estimated that on average about 376 beds in 1987 were occupied daily by this category of patient. This represents 9·8 per cent. of the average daily occupied by mental illness[1] beds and 2·3 per cent. of all occupied beds.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the admissions by diagnosis and order of admissions, including percentage change in numbers and rates per 100,000 population, of patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses in Wales in the last year for which figures are available;

(2) if he will list the admissions by diagnosis and order of admissions, including percentage change in numbers and rates per 100,000 population, of patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses, in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Grist: The information is as follows:

Admissions to mental illness hospitals and units in Wales with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenic psychoses, 1986-87, by order of admission and diagnosis, and showing percentage change 1986-87 and rates

	Numbers						*Rates per 100,000 population*						*Percentage change*
	First admissions		*Readmissions*		*All admissions*		*First admissions*		*Readmissions*		*All admissions*		
	1986	*1987*	*1986*	*1987*	*1986*	*1987*	*1986*	*1987*	*1986*	*1987*	*1986*	*1987*	*1986-87*
Simple type	5	7	32	51	37	58	0·18	0·25	1·13	1·80	1·31	2·04	56·76
Hebephrenic type	1	1	27	30	28	31	0·04	0·04	0·96	1·06	0·99	1·09	10·71
Catatonic type	2	1	9	9	11	10	0·07	0·04	0·32	0·32	0·39	0·35	−9·09
Paranoid type	39	42	222	220	261	262	1·38	1·48	7·87	7·76	9·25	9·24	0·38
Acute schizophrenic episode	17	7	50	22	67	29	0·60	0·25	1·77	0·78	2·38	1·02	−56·72
Latent schizophrenia	0	0	3	2	3	2	0·00	0·00	0·11	0·07	0·11	0·07	−33·33
Residual schizophrenic	12	3	279	213	291	216	0·43	0·11	9·89	7·51	10·32	7·62	−25·77
Schizoaffective type	16	19	133	143	149	162	0·57	0·67	4·71	5·04	5·28	5·71	8·72
Other Schizophrenia	3	2	10	9	13	11	0·11	0·07	0·35	0·32	0·46	0·39	−15·38
Unspecified Schizophrenia	111	80	925	1,014	1,036	1,094	3·93	2·82	32·75	35·75	36·72	38·37	5·60
Total	206	162	1,690	1,713	1,896	1,875	7·30	5·71	59·91	60·40	67·21	66·11	−1·11

Source: Mental Health Enquiry Ref: 88M/32A

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were discharged from mental illness hospitals in Wales in the last year; and how many were admitted for a hospital stay more than once during the year.

Mr. Grist: In 1987, there were 1,832 discharges or deaths of persons with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses from mental illness hospitals and units in Wales; it is not known how many patients were admitted more than once during the year.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to how many people discharged from hospital following a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses and subsequently taken by the police under the Mental Health Act to hospital have been refused admission in Wales in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Grist: This information is not available.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research projects his Department is funding in the current year to test the effectiveness of community care for people suffering from schizophrenia psychoses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The Department of Health's directly commissioned research covers Wales and I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given to him today by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were discharged from mental illness hospitals in Wales in each of the last five years; and how many of them were taken into local authority residential care in the same year.

Mr. Grist: The information is given in the following table:

Schizophrenia Psychoses

	Deaths	*Discharges*	*Discharged directly to local authority*	
			Residential Accommodation	*Home for the Mentally disordered*
1983	21	1,715	11	3
1984	20	1,701	19	0
1985	22	1,833	13	8

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[1] Mental illness, mental illness (children), adolescent psychiatry, elderly mentally infirm and psychogeriatrics.

	Deaths	Discharges	Discharged directly to local authority	
			Residential Accommodation	Home for the Mentally disordered
1986	26	1,824	17	1
1987	30	1,802	18	2

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in the last year on the provision of community care for patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses discharged from National Health Service mental hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: We have received a number of representations about the development of community based services for those suffering from mental illnesses, including those with schizophrenia. The bulk of these have been received in response to our strategic proposals for the development of mental illness services which we published in a consultation document in May of this year. We intend to issue a final document in the light of these responses next spring.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to how many people discharged from mental illness hospitals in Wales in the last year after a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses having been proved vulnerable homeless subsequently became voluntary homeless.

Mr. Grist: The information is not available centrally.

Mental Illness Hospitals

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new mental illness hospitals were opened and how many closed in Wales in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Grist: None, in the year ending 31 March 1988.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the mental illness hospitals scheduled to *(a)* open and *(b)* close in (i) the current and (ii) the next year.

Mr. Grist: In its strategic plan, South Glamorgan health authority has proposed the closure of the Royal Hamadryad hospital during 1988-89, with all beds being transferred to St. David's hospital, Cardiff.

No mental illness hospitals are scheduled to open in 1988-89 and none is scheduled to open or close in 1989-90.

Hospital Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of the hospital service in Gwynedd.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend is currently considering the proposals of Gwynedd health authority for the future of hospital services within its district. It would therefore not be appropriate for me to make a statement at this stage.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funds have been specifically earmarked for the care of the mentally ill following the closure of mental hospitals in Wales in the last year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: No mental illness hospitals have closed during the last year. In 1988-89 some £2·4 million of additional central funds have been allocated to Welsh health authorities for new projects for the care of people with a mental illness.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many residential places in the community will be provided in (*a*) the current and (*b*) the next year for those discharged from mental hospitals in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is not available. The number of places in homes for the mentally ill in each local authority in Wales is published in "Activities of Social Services Departments in Wales," a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many community psychiatric nurses there have been in Wales in each of the last two years.

Mr. Grist: At 31 October 1988 district health authority records showed there to be 178 (whole-time equivalent) community psychiatric nurses (mental illness) in post in Wales. No reliable figure is available centrally for 1987.

University of Wales

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received nationally and internationally concerning the closure of the University of Wales college of medicine research team for the care of the elderly.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: To date, 43 representations have been received from England and Wales.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will reconsider the decision not to renew the contract with his Department of the University of Wales college of medicine research team for the care of the elderly from January 1989.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No. We do not consider that there are grounds for reviewing the decision which was taken following a thorough assessment of the team's work by independent experts led by the chief scientist of the Department of Health. However, funding is to continue until 31 July 1989 so that certain research projects may be completed.

The contract with the current team for care research into care of the elderly has been extended until 31 July 1989 and discussions are taking place with the University of Wales college of medicine about future long-term arrangements.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will consider an appeal mechanism analagous to that at the Medical Research Council in respect of the University of Wales college of medicine research team for the care of the elderly loss of contract with the Department.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales why the project by the University of Wales college of medicine research team for the care of the elderly on the prevention of fractures is to be abandoned.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: During its extension period the research team is to secure the data base for this study. Subject to the future arrangements for reorientation of research into the care of the elderly the data may be drawn upon for a similar study.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations have been made to him *(a)* in [illegible]our of and *(b)* against the proposed increase in tolls on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend received 16 representations; all against the proposed increases in toll charges. These have been referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport who is the responsible Minister.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consideration he has given to assessments of the impact of the Severn bridge on the economy of *(a)* Newport and *(b)* Gwent in determining his policy in regard to (i) tolls and (ii) the need for a second crossing.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The impact of the Severn bridge tolls on the Welsh economy has been considered at two public inquiries when the inspectors concluded that their effect was insignificant. A further public inquiry into proposed toll increases will be held in February 1989.

The existing Severn crossing will continue to carry traffic safely for many years to come. However, in view of the increased traffic arising from economic growth, not least in Gwent and the rest of south Wales, the Government have made clear their commitment to provide a second crossing of the estuary before traffic flows are too great for the existing bridge. That is why urgent actions have been announced.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Elderly People

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provision is made for emergency payments by his Department for elderly people who have had their pension stolen and are unable to pay for their basic necessities.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: When an order book or girocheque is stolen arrangements are made to continue payment of benefit.

If, in the interim, the pensioner needs help with living expenses he may apply for a social fund crisis loan.

Death Grants

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, how many death grants were given in the year 1986-87 and at what cost; how many funeral payments were paid during the year 1987-88 and at what cost; how many funeral payments have been made, so far, in the current financial year and at what cost; how much of the amount paid out in the current financial year is due to be repaid to the social fund; and how much has been repaid.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is as follows:

	Type of payment	*Number of payments*	*Amount paid £*
1986-87	Death grants	585,335	17,560,050
1987-88	Funeral payments	36,986	16,185,943
1988-89	Funeral payments to 31 October 1988	19,129	9,331,130

Funeral payments are recoverable from the estate, if any, of the deceased. Up to 31 October 1988 a total of £196,487 has been recovered.

Pensions

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of old-age pensioners who receive *(a)* no national insurance pension and *(b)* less than the full amount of national insurance pension because their contribution record is incomplete, distinguishing between single pensioners, married pensioners where the wife only has category B pension and married pensioners where both spouses have been in paid work; and if he will give an indication of the age levels of those affected.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In 1987-88 there were approximately 95,000 people of pensionable age not in receipt of national insurance retirement pension and in receipt of supplementary pension[1].

Statistics do not give the breakdown between single and married pensioners in receipt of retirement pension. The table shows numbers of pensioners according to category and age, who are in receipt of less than 100 per cent. full basic retirement pension.

Aged	*Category A men*	*Category A women*	*Category BL wives*	*Category ABL wives*[2]	*Widows*
60-64	—	305,570	9,000	780	3,590
65-69	52,250	162,900	12,390	1,110	5,170
70-74	31,660	52,730	9,690	50	11,760
75-79	23,660	39,630	6,490	—	14,540
80-84	12,490	19,520	700	—	9,330
85-89	3,540	8,050	80	10	5,700
90 and over	900	2,720	—	—	3,010

Source: 1987-88 Public Expenditure White Paper.

[1] Supplementary Pension replaced by Income Support in April 1988.

[2] Category A—Pension on own contributions.

Category BL—Pension on husbands contributions.

Category ABL—Combined category A and BL pensions where this combined rate does not exceed the category BL rate.

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the current rate of supplement to the basic rate of retirement pension for those aged 80 years and above if that supplement had been indexed to the cost of living since its introduction in 1971; and what would be the annual cost of adopting such a rate.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The current rate of age addition for pensioners aged 80 and over, if uprated in line with prices since its introduction, would be £1·29. The annual cost of adopting this rate would be approximately £13[illegible] million. This represents additional expenditure of approximately £105 million.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will bring forward proposals to give equal treatment in respect of the retirement pension to pensioners with earned income to those with unearned or investment income.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no plans to do so. The earnings rule is a test of retirement and therefore applies only to income from work.

Bradford Resource Centre

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff from local offices of his Department in the Bradford district have undertaken training courses organised by Bradford resource centre since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None.

Hardship Payments

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the criteria for eligibility for a hardship payment; why all applicants for hardship payments are referred to his Department in London; what published information is available to the public about eligibility for hardship payments; and what action he proposes to make the public more aware of the availability of hardship payments.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Each application is deat with on its merits but the factors which are considered when making decisions on severe hardship include the young person's health and vulnerability, (including the threat of homelessness); the availability of any income or savings; the prospects of a speedy entry in YTS; the availability of work, including casual and part-time employment; whether the claimant has any friends or relations who could put him up or otherwise offer assistance, and the extent and pressing nature of any financial commitments.

Cases are referred to headquarters for decision as this leads to a consistency of treatment in exercising this safety net power and provides an opportunity to monitor the new scheme.

One million copies of a supplement to leaflet FB23 "Young Persons guide to Social Security" were distributed in May and contained advice about the severe hardship provisions. The main leaflet has now been reprinted and the October edition contains the same information. An explanation of the factors taken into account in deciding applications under these provisions was given to the press on 30 September and a copy has been placed in the Library.

There is no intention to issue any further publicity.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many young people aged 16 and 17 years who left school in the summer have been granted hardship payments since 12 September; how many applications for hardship payments have been refused; how many applications are under consideration; what is the average payment made; and if he will list this information for each local office of his Department in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In the period from 12 September to 18 November a total of 1,213 applications for a direction by the Secretary of State under the severe hardship provision had been received. In 802 cases (66 per cent.) a direction was given to enable payment to be made and in 411 cases (34 per cent.) a direction was refused. The figures include both those who left school this summer and those who left previously. Decisions are given by telephone within 24 hours of the full details being referred to headquarters. Once a decision is given that a young person is entitled to income support on the grounds of severe hardship the adjudication officer in the local office awards benefit at the appropriate weekly rate for the duration of the direction.

The other information requested is not immediately available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Benefit

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the rent ceilings for each London borough above which no more housing benefit is payable.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no such ceilings. Under the Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987 (S.I. 1987/1971) it is for local authorities to determine the level of rent eligible for housing benefit in each case. Authorities have powers to limit the rent eligible for benefit where they consider the rent is unreasonably high. Any decision by the authority to limit the eligible rent must be taken on an individual case basis, taking account of the personal circumstances of the claimant.

Under the arrangements for subsidising local authorities' housing benefit expenditure, a reduced rate of subsidy is payable where housing benefit is awarded on rents above the subsidy rent threshold for the area. The table shows the subsidy thresholds for the London boroughs.

Authority	*Subsidy thresholds*
Barking	56·58
Barnet	77·32
Bexley	57·32
Brent	62·43
Bromley	71·67
Camden	88·09
City of London	85·97
Croydon	74·41
Ealing	70·55
Enfield	60·69
Greenwich	55·13
Hackney	59·55
Hammersmith	61·85
Haringey	63·91
Harrow	66·02
Havering	63·53
Hillingdon	66·71
Hounslow	69·75
Islington	64·15
Kensington and Chelsea	76·31

Authority	*Subsidy thresholds*
Kingston	71·15
Lambeth	62·89
Lewisham	54·41
Merton	72·77
Newham	54·88
Redbridge	55·54
Richmond	74·83
Southwark	56·41
Sutton	68·96
Tower Hamlets	58·83
Waltham Forest	48·73
Wandsworth	69·64
Westminster	114·89

Community Care

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the advice issued to regional and local offices by Branch RD22 of his Department on how to reply to letters from hon. Members regarding the low level of spending on community care grants; and why it was considered necessary to issue such advice.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In order to ensure that letters from local offices to hon. Members are as helpful as possible, regions were reminded in July of general advice on the handling of correspondence and of the following points about social fund budget management:

—local office budgets are annual, not monthly

—the overall aim is, within the framework of the law, directions and guidance, to use the local office budgets to ensure, as far as is reasonably possible, that applications of similar priority receive similar treatment throughout the year, whenever they occur

—the first few months of the scheme may not be typical, for instance in terms of the volume of applications.

Income Support

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the additional cost of increasing the income support personal allowances in April 1989 to the illustrative rates in the technical annex to "Reform of Social Security" (Cmnd. 9691), uprated to take account of changes in the Rossi price index for the periods taken into account in the 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989 upratings and increased in respect of the 20 per cent. community charge contribution; and what would be the resulting personal allowance.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The personal allowances are set in the context of the overall rates of income support, including the rates of children's allowances and the various premiums. It would therefore not be meaningful to recalculate one element of the illustrative figures in the technical annex.

Child Support

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update to November 1988 the information provided in the reply of 8 November 1982 to Dr. McDonald the then hon. Member for Thurrock, *Official Report*, columns *51-52*, relating to child support.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is set out in the table and reflects the fact that uprating is now in April each year.

(a) Date	*(b)* *M/C UB rate* £	*(c)* *Dep increase* £	*(d)* *Child Benefit/ Family allowance* £	*(e)* *Total child*[1] *support* £	*(f)* *Column (e) as percentage of column (b)* £	*(g)* *Column (e) expressed at APR 1988 prices*[2] £	*(h)* *Column (g) as index APR 1988 = 100*
5 July 1948	2·10	0·375	0·25	0·625	29·8	8·35	57·6
30 August 1951	2·10	0·625	0·25	0·875	41·7	9·94	68·6
24 July 1952	2·70	0·65	0·25	0·90	33·3	9·45	65·2
19 May 1955	3·25	0·75	0·40	1·15	35·4	11·33	78·1
6 February 1958	4·00	1·10	0·40	1·50	37·5	13·11	90·4
6 April 1961	4·625	1·35	0·40	1·75	37·8	14·53	100·2
7 March 1963	5·45	1·60	0·40	2·00	36·7	15·44	106·5
28 January 1965	6·50	1·85	0·40	2·25	34·6	16·45	113·4
28 October 1967	7·30	2·10	0·40	2·50	34·2	16·72	115·3
11 April 1968	7·30	2·05	0·75	2·80	38·4	17·96	123·9
10 October 1968	7·30	1·90	0·90	2·80	38·4	17·73	122·3
6 November 1969	8·10	2·20	0·90	3·10	38·3	18·59	128·2
23 September 1971	9·70	2·28	0·90	3·70	38·1	19·05	131·4
5 October 1972	10·90	3·30	0·90	4·20	38·5	19·93	137·4
4 October 1973	11·90	3·70	0·90	4·60	38·7	19·86	137·0
25 July 1974	13·90	4·50	0·90	5·40	38·8	20·55	141·7
7 April 1975	15·90	4·70	1·50	6·20	39·0	20·04	138·2
20 November 1975	18·00	5·50	1·50	7·00	38·9	20·26	139·7
18 November 1976	20·90	6·60	1·50	8·10	38·8	20·39	140·6
4 April 1977	20·90	5·60	2·50	8·10	38·8	18·75	129·3
17 November 1977	23·80	6·50	2·50	9·00	37·8	20·04	138·2
4 April 1978	23·80	4·40	4·60	9·00	37·8	19·30	133·1
16 November 1978	25·50	3·70	6·00	9·70	38·0	19·99	137·9
2 April 1979	25·50	1·70	8·00	9·70	38·0	18·90	130·3
15 November 1979	29·95	3·40	8·00	11·40	38·1	20·02	138·1
24 November 1980	33·40	2·50	9·50	12·00	35·9	18·27	126·0
23 November 1981	36·40	1·60	10·50	12·10	33·2	16·46	113·5
25 November 1982	40·45	0·60	11·70	12·30	30·4	15·74	108·6
24 November 1983	43·75	0·30	13·00	13·30	30·4	16·24	112·0
20 November 1984	46·00	[3]—	13·70	13·70	29·8	15·94	109·9
28 November 1985	49·25	—	14·00	14·00	28·4	15·44	106·5
28 July 1986	49·80	—	14·20	14·20	28·5	15·41	106·3

(a) *Date*	*(b)* *M/C UB rate* *£*	*(c)* *Dep increase* *£*	*(d)* *Child Benefit/ Family allowance* *£*	*(e)* *Total child*[1] *support* *£*	*(f)* *Column (e) as percentage of column (b)* *£*	*(g)* *Column (e) expressed at APR 1988 prices*[2] *£*	*(h)* *Column (g) as index APR 1988 = 100*
6 April 1987	50·85	—	14·50	14·50	28·5	15·07	103·9
11 April 1988	52·95	—	14·50	14·50	27·4	14·50	100·0

[1] Does not show the effect of child tax allowance to the standard rate taxpayer. In years prior to April 1979 some recipients of unemployment benefit would also have derived advantage from child tax allowance because of their receipt of earnings in the course of the tax year.

[2] Based on the movement in the general Index of Retail Prices between the dates shown and April 1988.

[3] Child dependency addition abolished from 26 November 1984.

Cold Weather Payments

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving income support in each of the categories eligible, for cold weather payments (*a*) in Great Britain and (*b*) from each of the Derby social security offices, at the latest date for which information is available.

Mr. Scott: Information is not available in the form requested. Maximum estimates of those in the eligible categories, which take no account of the effect of capital, are as follows:

	Numbers
Higher pensioner premium	520,000
Pensioner premium	1,250,000
Disability premium	270,000
Disabled Child premium	10,000
Families with a child under age 5	615,000
Total	2,665,000

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Postal Services (Disruption)

81. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will draw up contingency plans to eliminate inconvenience to right hon. and hon. Members arising from the disruption of postal services.

Mr. Wakeham: I hope that there will not be any disruption of postal services. In the event of industrial action by post office staff, I regret that it is not possible to isolate totally right hon. and hon. Members. However, I am assured that the postmaster of the Palace of Westminster will make every effort to assist Members who bring special cases of difficulty to his notice.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sheepmeat

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the sheepmeat regime.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The EC Commission has recently produced revised proposals for a review of the sheepmeat regime. Discussion on these proposals are at an early stage.

Milk Marketing Board

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the chairman of the Milk Marketing Board; and what was discussed.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have regular contacts with the chairman of the Milk Marketing Board to discuss various issues affecting the dairy industry.

Paper-making Industry

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to receive the three reports, recently referred to by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder), dealing with problems of lead dioxide, chlorine dioxide and bleach, in relation to the paper-making industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: We are aiming to produce the reports referred to in three months. I assume the question refers to the use of paper-based packaging materials. Dioxins can be formed during the bleaching of wood pulp and it has been found that low levels may be present in paper products made from bleached pulp. Recent studies in Scandinavia and North America have suggested that small amounts of dioxins can subsequently migrate into foodstuffs from paper-based packaging materials. The available data indicate that the levels are extremely small and do not pose a hazard to health, but none the less my Ministry is now carrying out a thorough investigation of dioxins in food, including a programme of laboratory analysis, to decide if any action is necessary.

Alternative Land Use

Mr. Adley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with the National Farmers Union on the anticipated alternative uses of farmland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friend and I frequently meet NFU office holders and members to discuss a wide range of issues, including alternative uses of farmland.

Nitrates

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he proposes to discuss the desk studies on the effect of nitrates on farmland with industry representatives.

Mr. Ryder: The desk studies will be discussed with industry representatives in the near future.

European Agriculture Guidance and Guarantee Fund

Ms. Quin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, for each standard planning region, the amount received in financial support from the guarantee section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund, for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. MacGregor: Information on receipts from the guarantee section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund is not recorded by planning region.

Fisheries Policy

Ms. Quin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, for each standard planning region, the amount received in financial assistance for fisheries from the European Economic Community budget for each year since the coming into force of the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Information on financial assistance from the European Community for fisheries is not recorded by planning region.

Member's Correspondence

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne may expect a reply to the matter raised with the Parliamentary Secretary Baroness Trumpington on behalf of Mr. D. V. Richards, of Grovewood House, 1 Roseware close, Camborne, on 25 July.

Mr. Ryder: A reply to the letter of 25 July from my hon. Friend was dispatched on 25 November. I understand that officials in this Ministry contacted Mr. Richards direct about the points he raised in this correspondence on 11 August.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Ward: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in view of the surplus of dairy products within the European Economic Community, he will cancel the trial of bovine somatotropin.

Mr. MacGregor: Applications for product licences or animal test certificates under the Medicines Act 1968 must be considered on the basis of safety, quality and efficacy. I am not empowered to take into account economic factors.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the places or regions in which cattle infected by bovine spongiform encephalopathy are found in the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: Up to 25 November, 1,677 cases of BSE had been confirmed in the following counties and regions of Great Britain:

County	*Confirmed cases*
Avon	16
Bedfordshire	6
Berkshire	22
Borders	2
Buckinghamshire	17
Cambridge	7
Central	2
Cheshire	30
Cleveland	1
Clwyd	12
Cornwall	187
Cumbria	27
Derbyshire	20
Devon	249
Dorset	101
Dumfries	10
Durham	2
Dyfed	59
Essex	3
Mid Glamorgan	6
South Glamorgan	2
West Glamorgan	1
Gloucestershire	74
Grampian	5
Guernsey	18
Gwent	15
Gwynedd	6
Hampshire	64
Hereford and Worcestershire	35
Hertfordshire	8
Highland	4
Humberside	5
Isle of Man	1
Isle of Wight	7
Jersey	0
Kent	46
Lancashire	29
Leicestershire	32
Lincolnshire	23
Lothian	2
Manchester	0
Merseyside	1
Norfolk	14
Northamptonshire	7
Northumberland	5
Nottinghamshire	7
Orkney	1
Oxfordshire	31
Powys	13
Shropshire	41
Shetland	1
Somerset	113
Staffordshire	20
Strathclyde	6
Suffolk	26
Surrey	27
East Sussex	17
West Sussex	37
Tayside	5
Warwickshire	13
Wiltshire	69
West Midlands	1
North Yorkshire	55
South Yorkshire	2
West Yorkshire	9

Mr. Wray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures his Department have introduced to prevent human consumption of beef infected by bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. MacGregor: From 8 August this year, all cattle suspected, on clinical grounds, of being affected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy have been compulsorily slaughtered and their carcases either incinerated or buried.

Nuvan 500 EC

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make the results of research into the presence of residues of Nuvan 500 EC in salmon flesh available to the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: Surveillance for residues of the active ingredient dichlorvos in the flesh of farmed salmon is in progress and the results will be published in the food surveillance paper series. Until the work is complete it would be premature to make a statement.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when and where the results of research into the environmental and health effects of Nuvan 500 EC will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: Data including the results of research provided by a company in support of the approval of a pesticide are a matter of commercial confidentiality. The publication of such information would therefore be a matter for the company concerned. However, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland's marine laboratory in Aberdeen is carrying out investigations into the environmental effect of Nuvan 500 EC and its possible toxicity to a number of marine organisms. This work has not yet been completed, but consideration will be given to the publication of the results of research where publication will not breach commercial confidentiality.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether *(a)* all products known as pesticides and *(b)* Nuvan 500 EC should comply with the Control of Pesticides Regulations for supply, storage and handling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 cover pesticides as defined in regulation 3. This includes the product Nuvan 500 EC as approved for use in poultryhouses. The regulations cover sale, supply, storage, use and advertisement.

Research

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the Nature Conservancy Council about future priorities for research on environmentally sensitive agriculture and nature conservation; and if he will make a statement about the outcome of his research programme.

Mr. Ryder: Ministers and officials of my Ministry keep in close touch with the Nature Conservancy Council at all levels and research priorities are a frequent topic in these contacts.

My Ministry is currently in discussions with the NCC about the direction of projects and programmes concerning the monitoring of environmental effects in environmentally sensitive areas, set-aside and the interrelationship between agriculture and the environment, including wildlife and water quality.

Chernobyl (Compensation Claims)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will establish local adjudicating panels to determine the level of compensation to be paid to the 122 farmers in England and Wales who lost outstanding claims following the Chernobyl nuclear accident.

Mr. MacGregor: No, I have already made the Government's position clear on these cases.

Chernobyl (Aerial Survey)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library the maps and reports of the recently completed post-Chernobyl aerial survey of Cumbria which was shown to representatives of the National Farmers Union at Eden Bridge house, Carlisle, on Wednesday 23 November.

Mr. Ryder: We have not yet received the final report on this survey. The map referred to was a preliminary contour map of the caesium deposition. The numerical interpretation of this data is being carried out and a full report will be placed in the Library of the House when it is available.

Milk Products

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost to the European Economic Community for export restitution and other costs for the export of all milk products for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. MacGregor: Expenditure by the European Community on exports of milk products in 1987 was 2,823 million ecu (£2,030 million).

New Zealand Butter

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what decision has been made by the Council of Ministers on New Zealand butter access; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Since United Kingdom accession the Council has on a number of occasions decided upon the level of New Zealand butter imports at a reduced rate of levy. The current arrangement expires at the end of this year and the Council has not yet decided what should succeed it.

Farm Capital Grants

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future of farm capital grants.

Mr. MacGregor: Since the agriculture improvement scheme was introduced in 1985 there have been many important changes in our agricultural policy. Among these, we have introduced a number of initiatives to assist farmers in conserving the countryside and controlling pollution.In the European Community we have also made good progress in dealing with the surpluses and bringing production more into line with demand. In consultation with my right hon. Friends, the Secretaries of State for the Environment, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, I have been reviewing the agriculture improvement scheme to see whether capital grants can more closely reflect these changing priorities.

As a result, I have decided to introduce a new grant scheme called "The Farm and Conservation Grants

Scheme" in February 1989. Its provisions have still to be negotiated with the EC Commission but, subject to obtaining that agreement, I plan to make the following changes.

First, I intend to increase the assistance we offer to lowland farmers to install facilities for the storage, treatment and disposal of slurry and silage effluent. Grant rates in the lowlands will be significantly improved and the coverage extended, for example, to include fixed disposal piping and safety fencing. I have agreed with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary a provision of up to £50 million over the next three years on these grants. This compares with £17 million spent in the first two years of the AIS. Reducing the incidence of farm pollution must be a top priority for the industry. By these means the Government will be further assisting farmers in tackling the problems.

Secondly, I plan to introduce three new conservation grants. These will encourage the regeneration of native woodlands and of heather moors and assist in the cost of repairs to vernacular farm buildings.

It is clear that certain grants which have helped to stimulate the productive capacity of the industry in the past are less appropriate in present circumstances. Grants for new farm buildings, roads and one or two minor items will be discontinued. Grants which help to keep grazing land in good heart will remain.

For horticulture, enhanced rates of grant for the replacement of heated glasshouses will also remain, with grants for orchard replanting being reinstated, both until the end of 1993.

I believe it is important that the grants, with their increased emphasis on pollution and conservation, should reflect the fact that these are priority areas for farmers in both the lowlands and the less-favoured areas. I plan therefore to narrow the differential for most grants to 10 per cent. I would, however, expect the grassland grants and the three new conservation grants to be of particular benefit in the less-favoured areas.

The arrangements recently announced by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, under which national park authorities can offer additional grants on some items up to a maximum of 80 per cent. will now be adapted to the new grant scheme.

To ensure proper management of the transition from the current scheme to the new one I am closing the agriculture improvement scheme forthwith. Orders taking immediate effect have been laid before Parliament today. Farmers who have already committed themselves to investment in the expectation of claiming grant will now have until 31 May to deliver their claim unless they hold (or have applied for) an improvement plan. Grants already included in an approved improvement plan or one on which approval is awaited will not be affected by the closure. Two specific categories of grant will also be exempt from the closure orders. These are the special glasshouse replacement grants which I announced in July and those for growers in the Isles of Scilly, on which orders were laid on 16 November. In addition, in Northern Ireland only, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be continuing the grants for waste disposal which have only recently been reintroduced there.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Economic League (Subscriptions)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proceedings have been taken, and against which companies, under the Companies Act for failing to declare subscriptions to the Economic League; and what penalties have been imposed on companies for failing to make suitable decarations.

Mr. Maude: Since 1979 no proceedings have been taken by my Department against a company's directors for failure to comply with the statutory requirement to report contributions for political purposes.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he proposes to seek to make amendments to the Companies Act 1967 to stop companies avoiding declarations about subscriptions to the Economic League; and what representations he has received about such companies' failure to make such declarations.

Mr. Maude: I have no evidence that directors of companies are not complying with their obligations under section 235 of the Companies Act 1985 to state in their annual report gifts of money for political purposes, and I have received no representations on the matter.

Mergers and Takeovers

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many British industries which were the subject of mergers or takeovers for each year since 1975, reduced their work force; and what was the number of redundancies in each case.

Mr. Maude: My Department does not maintain statistics on employment and redundancies. The Department of Employment does not maintain statistics on redundancies which can be correlated to merger activity, but overall redundancy statistics by industry are published in the labour market data section of the *Employment Gazette*.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what evidence is gathered by his Department regarding the effect on efficiency of mergers and takeovers of British industrial companies.

Mr. Maude: My Department monitors available academic evidence.

House of Fraser (Holdings) plc

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he has received the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading as to whether the report of the inspectors on the affairs of House of Fraser (Holdings) plc demonstrates the existence of new material facts such as to justify a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Maude: Yes. On 25 November, in accordance with the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading, my right hon. and noble Friend, the Secretary of State, announced his decision not to refer the acquisition in 1984 and 1985 by Al Fayed Investment and Trust (UK) plc of House of Fraser plc.

Faserwerk Bottrop GmbH

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) whether he has received any representations about discriminatory assistance given to Faserwerk Bottrop GmbH by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany;

(2) what action he proposes to take in the light of the discriminatory assistance given to Faserwerk Bottrop GmbH by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany;

(3) if he will make a statement on the implications for progress towards the single European market of the discriminatory assistance given to Faserwerk Bottrop GmbH by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany;

(4) whether he is aware of any action taken by the European Commission in the case of the discriminatory assistance given to Faserwerk Bottrop GmbH by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have received representations about the assistance given by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany to Faserwerk Bottrop GmbH and officials have discussed this matter both with the Commission and with representatives of the British polypropylene producers. The proposal to grant aid was properly notified by the Federal German Government to the European Commission. The Commission concluded that the proposed aid would not distort competition within the European Community in synthetic fibres for the traditional textile and clothing sector and was consequently compatible with the common market.

The Government fully support the European Commission in its efforts to ensure rigorous and even-handed enforcement of the state aid rules. This is an important aspect of creating a genuine single European market. I would therefore expect the Commission to apply the same criteria in its assessment of any similar aid proposals, including those for United Kingdom companies which meet the criteria for DTI financial support. Officials will be discussing in greater detail the issues raised by this case with the Commission shortly.

Balance of Trade (Iraq)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the balance of trade figures for trade between the United Kingdom and Iraq; what export credit guarantee money has been made available to United Kingdom firms since the end of hostilities; and what support is given to United Kingdom businesses by Her Majesty's embassy in Iraq.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* The value of United Kingdom visible exports to Iraq in 1987 was £272 million and imports totalled £324 million. (Country of origin basis.)

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave details of new credit facilities offered to Iraq during his recent visit to Baghdad in his written answer to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Mr. Holland) on Monday 14 November, at column *399*.

Our embassy in Baghdad provides the normal range of services in support of British exporters.

DEFENCE

Chieftain Tank

Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to make known the Government's decision on the replacement for the Chieftain tank.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on Friday 25 November at column *405*.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the implications for employment at Commercial Hydraulics, Liverpool Ltd., in awarding the contracts for the Chieftain tank replacement programme.

Mr. Sainsbury: All relevant factors are being considered.

Tornado

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the timetable to be adopted for the Tornado mid-life update.

Mr. Sainsbury: We hope to reach a decision in the near future on the Tornado GR1 mid-life update programme.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mortgages (Tax Relief)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total loss of revenue to the Treasury arising from mortgage tax relief in each of the last nine years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The estimated costs of mortgage interest tax relief in the United Kingdom are shown in the table. Figures for 1983-84 onwards include the cost of relief given to non-taxpayers.

Cost of mortgage tax relief

	£ million
1980-81	1,960
1981-82	2,050
1982-83	2,150
1983-84	2,780
1984-85	3,580
1985-86	4,750
1986-87	4,670
1987-88	[1]4,800
1988-89	[1]5,250

[1] Provisional.

Secret Service

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for how many years class XX, vote 3, Cabinet Office: Secret Services, has appeared in the Vote on Account.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Every year since the inception of Votes on Account over a century ago, they have applied to the Secret Service Vote in the same way as to all other substantive Estimates.

Taxation

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many tax units aged 65 years and over paid capital gains tax in the financial year 1987-88;

(2) how many tax units aged 60 years and over paid capital gains in the financial year 1987-88.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret that the information requested is not available; but it is estimated that some 50,000 taxpayers aged 65 and over incurred capital gains tax liabilities on assets disposed of during 1985-86.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pensioner tax units pay at the 40p rate.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is estimated that in 1988-89 some 150,000 married couples and single persons aged 65 and over will be liable to income tax at the higher rate. Estimates are based on a projection of the 1985-86 survey of personal incomes and are provisional.

Pensions

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pensioner tax units receive occupational pensions; and if he will break down this figure into bands of occupational pension income of £1,000, up to a maximum or £20,000.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Provisional estimates for 1987-88 based on a projection of the 1985-86 survey of personal incomes are in the table. The estimates cover only those aged tax units where the Inland Revenue has records; many aged tax units with small amounts of occupational pensions will not have records. A more detailed income analysis would be unreliable.

Aged tax units[1] receiving occupational pensions

Occupational pension £ per annum	*Aged tax units[1] million*
Less than 1,000	1·9
1,000 to 5,000	1·3
5,000 to 10,000	0·3
Over 10,000	0·1
Total	3·6

[1] Single people aged 65 or more and married couples with at least one spouse aged 65 or more.

Banking Services

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will advise when he expects to receive the report of the Jack committee on banking services law; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The review committee on banking services law under the chairmanship of Professor Robert Jack is expected to pass its report to the Treasury and the Bank of England in January. It is the intention of the Government to publish the committee's report shortly thereafter.

Tax Fraud

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many full-time staff have been engaged in investigation of tax fraud and evasion for each year since 1975.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Inland Revenue resources, expressed as units of full-time staff, employed in investigating tax evasion and tax fraud are as follows:

	Staff units
Year ending 31 October	
1980	1,265
1981	1,405
1982	1,580
1983	1,705
Year ending 31 March	
1984	1,835
1985	2,250
1986	2,290
1987	2,345
1988	2,600

The earlier figures requested are not available.

Embassies (Rating)

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a table showing the number of diplomatic domestic properties, total domestic rateable value, the amount of rates paid by Her Majesty's Treasury and the amounts paid to Her Majesty's Treasury by embassies as the beneficial portion for 1988-89 and provide a breakdown of the figures for each rating authority.

Mr. Major: I have arranged for a table showing the information requested to be placed in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cultural Agreements

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which articles, agreed in the cultural agreement between Her Majesty's Government and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on 31 March 1987, have been implemented; and at what cost to Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Eggar: The memorandum of understanding signed on 31 March 1987 is designed to facilitate and encourage bilateral exchanges in the fields of information, culture and education. It contains a number of specific commitments on all of which good progress has been made: two annual Anglo-Soviet public lectures have now taken place; a successful Soviet Week was held in Birmingham in October and arrangements are in hand for a British Week in Kiev in 1990; Protocols on school exchanges and on co-operation in the field of television and radio broadcasting have recently been signed.

The memorandum is, however, essentially designed to facilitate rather than fund initiatives, many of which are private. Contacts have developed rapidly in the last two years with encouragement from both Governments. We are devoting an additional £250,000 per annum promoting Anglo-Soviet activities in the fields covered by the MOU and other related areas.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will publish a table showing *(a)* the cultural agreements and conventions concluded with other countries since 1979 and *(b)* the amount of Her Majesty's Government's expenditure on each agreement or convention.

Mr. Eggar: We have concluded the following agreements since 1979. Expenditure for 1988-89 by the British Council, which acts as our agent under the agreements, is shown in brackets. This is not necessarily all directly incurred because of the agreements, although it is all relevant to their purpose.

	£
Ecuador	291,000
Morocco	501,000
Algeria	873,000
Korea	766,000
Venezuela	461,000
Hungary	882,000
Cameroon	259,000
Tunisia	304,000

Slava Uspensky

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the case of Slava Uspensky of Moscow, who has been refused an exit visa until 1996.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have raised the case of the Uspensky family, including Slava Uspensky, at every suitable opportunity. We will continue to press the Soviet authorities—including during Mr. Gorbachev's forthcoming visit—until exit visas are issued to the whole family.

Thailand

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British people imprisoned in Thailand have submitted requests for King's pardons over the last three years; how many such requests he has supported; and if he will in future make it his policy to support all such applications on behalf of prisoners who are HIV positive.

Mr. Eggar: Over the period from 1985 to date, four British prisoners have applied for King's pardons. Two have been successful, and two have petitions in progress. All are diagnosed HIV positive.

It is not our policy to support applications for royal pardons where the due process of law has been observed. (We do, however, undertake to deliver their applications.) Exceptions to that policy are made on humanitarian grounds and in cases where the death penalty has been imposed. Should a prisoner who is already diagnosed HIV positive develop symptoms of AIDS and a reduction of life expectancy becomes manifest, a case would clearly exist also on humanitarian grounds for seeking the prisoner's early release. In this, policy is no different than had the reduction in life expectancy resulted from some other disease, or had other overriding humanitarian considerations arisen.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people from the United Kingdom are currently imprisoned in Thailand; how many are held in chains; how many have been so held during the last three years; and what representations he has made to the Thai Government that this practice should cease.

Mr. Eggar: Currently, there are 13 British nationals imprisoned in Thailand. None is held permanently in chains. The wearing of chains is ordered on initial detention, for court appearances and transfers between prisons. They are also imposed for specific periods as punishment for bad behaviour. When British prisoners were held in chains for no apparent reason, consular representations were made to the Thai authorities and the chains were removed. The chains themselves are lightweight aluminium shackles fastened around the legs.

No representations have been made to the Thai Government on the general question, as the system is applied equally to all prisoners whatever their nationality. We have no grounds to seek treatment better than that afforded to Thai nationals.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how often he expects consular staff to visit British people held in prisons abroad; and what has been the frequency of such visits to British prisoners in Thailand during the last year.

Mr. Eggar: Consular staff aim at quarterly visits to British nationals imprisoned in non-European countries. In European countries, where there are only a few prisoners serving long sentences, the aim is to visit every six months and in any event at least once a year.

In Thailand, consular staff try to visit prisoners every four to six weeks, but staff shortages and an expanding work load because of the increasing number of British tourists to that country have combined to extend the period between visits. More staff have recently been dedicated to prison visiting, and the embassy expects the period between visits will soon be on or near its aim.

From November 1987 to September 1988, five consular visits were made to prisoners in Bangkok. Prisons in other parts of Thailand have been visited three times in the same period.

Human Rights (Russia)

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will convey to Mr. Gorbachev the widespread concern in Britain over violations of human rights in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Eggar: Yes.

United States President-elect

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will meet the President-elect of the United States of America.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will be taking an early opportunity to visit the United States of America to meet the new Administration.

Fiji

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications of the new constitution of Fiji for United Kingdom-Fiji relations.

Mr. Eggar: The traditionally friendly relations between the United Kingdom and Fiji continue to exist, and we hope that Fiji will soon be able to return to parliamentary democracy under a constitution acceptable to a majority of all the people there.

Human Rights (China)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed human rights with a representative of the Government of China.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend discussed human rights with the then Chinese Foreign Minister, Wu Xueqian, when he visited the United Kingdom in March 1988.

Middle-East Peace Conference

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest prospects for an international middle east peace conference.

Mr. Waldegrave: We shall continue our efforts to remove the barriers to an international conference on the Arab/Israel dispute. We are encouraged that the Palestine National Council, has accepted Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for such a conference.

Odile Harrington

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during the recent visit to Zimbabwe by the Minister of State, there was any discussion about the human rights implications of the decision of the Chief Justice of Zimbabwe to reduce from 25 to 12 years the sentence passed upon Odile Harrington; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: No. The Zimbabwean Supreme Court's decision to reduce the sentence of Miss Odile Harrington, who is not a British citizen, was taken after I returned from Africa.

Exit Visas (Soviet Union)

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make it his policy to encourage the Soviet Union to honour pledges made in international treaties and grant exit visas to those who have been refused them.

Mr. Waldegrave: We already take every opportunity to press the Soviet Government, both bilaterally and multilaterally, to implement in full their international commitments (particularly those contained in the Helsinki Final Act) and to issue exit visas to all those who wish to leave the Soviet Union. Mr. Gorbachev's visit to the United Kingdom from 12-14 December will be a further opportunity to do so.

Nerve Gas (Somalia)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence he has received of the shipments of nerve gas to Somalia; and what representation he has made or will make to the Government of Somalia and to the United Nations in order to achieve international pressure to prevent the use of such materials.

Mrs. Chalker: We are not aware of any evidence to support claims that nerve gas has been supplied to Somalia. In these circumstances it would not be appropriate to make representations to the Government of Somalia or in the United Nations.

Dr. Emilio Alvarez Montalban

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department arranged the programme for Dr. Emilio Alvarez Montalban on his recent visit to Britain on 13 to 18 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The Central Office of Information arranged a programme for Dr. Alvarez at the request of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on whose invitation Dr. Emilio Alvarez Montalban visited Britain between 13 and 18 November.

Mr. Eggar: Dr. Alvarez visited the United Kingdom at the invitation of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total cost to public funds of the recent visit of Dr. Emilio Alvarez Montalban to Britain; and on what budget it was borne.

Mr. Eggar: The estimated total cost to public funds of Dr. Alvarez' recent visit was £1,200. Like any other visit undertaken as part of the sponsored visits programme, it will be charged to the budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's information department.

EMPLOYMENT

Tourism Review

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those representations he has received on the tourism review, by organisations and by individuals.

Mr. Lee: The review team has consulted and received representations from a wide range of those involved with the tourism industry, including representative associations, firms in the various sectors of the industry, public sector bodies and individuals. Consultation has been on an individual and confidential basis and it would not be appropriate to publish a detailed list.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress and purpose of the tourism review.

Mr. Lee *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* My right hon. Friend announced the tourism review on 18 July. It is due to report to him at the end of the year. Its purpose is to ensure that Government support for the tourism industry continues to be effective and appropriate.

English Tourist Board

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what terms of reference have been given to the consultants employed on the review of the work of the English Tourist Board; and if he will make them known to that board.

Mr. Lee: The terms of reference for the review are:

to consider the role of Government in relation to the industry;

to consider the level and distribution of funding provided by the Department of Employment;

to consider the mechanisms by which these funds are applied; and their cost-effectiveness in relation to the

Government's objectives;

to consider the implications for the BTA and the ETB of any changes that might be recommended.

These are closely reflected in the announcement my right hon. Friend made on 18 July and are known to both the English Tourist Board and the British Tourist Authority.

Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many participants in employment training are over 50 years of age; and what percentage that is of the total.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is not yet all available and will not be available in the precise form requested. However, early indications suggest that 5 per cent. of those starting training are aged 51 and over.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many managing agencies which ran community programme schemes are now operating employment training schemes; and what percentage this is of the total.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is not available. However, at 9 September there were 1,126 training managers and 169 training agents involved in employment training. The majority of former community programe providers are included in these totals or operating as subcontractors to other training managers.

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what backlog exists in interviewing applicants for employment training.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 25 November 1988]*: Applicants to employment training awaiting individual assessment with a training agent are waiting on average two weeks from the time they are referred to the programme. The aim is to reduce the waiting period to five days by the second half of December.

Correspondence

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne may expect a detailed reply to correspondence forwarded on 4 May, on behalf of Mrs. J. R. Tummon, of 7 New Lane, Mount Ambrose, Redruth, Cornwall, concerning the resettlement of a disabled person.

Mr. Lee: I have now written to my hon. Friend.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to how many man hours of work were lost in each of the last five years as a result of absence resulting from schizophrenia psychoses.

Mr. Lee: I regret that the information is not available in the form requested.

Bradford Resource Centre

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff from unemployment benefit offices and jobcentres in the Bradford travel-to-work area have undertaken training courses organised by Bradford resource centre since 1979.

Mr. Lee: Training for staff employed in unemployment benefit offices and jobcentres in the Bradford district is covered by courses provided internally by the employment service.

The Bradford resource centre is an external body funded by Bradford council which provides courses free of charge. Records of attendance on external courses are kept only if there is a cost to the employment service. It is therefore not possible to estimate the number of staff from unemployment benefit offices and jobcentres who may have attended courses at the centre.

Careers Services

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action he is taking to encourage local careers services to contact school leavers who are believed not to have obtained a YTS place or a job since leaving school to contact the careers service for advice; and what action he is taking to make known to the public, including school leavers, the availability of hardship payments.

Mr. Cope: Local education authorities are under a statutory duty to observe the Secretary of State's guidance which advises them to take all reasonable steps to help young people find suitable employment or training. Local arrangements to implement this guidance are the responsibility of each local education authority.

One million copies of a temporary supplement to the Department of Social Security's leaflet "Young persons guide to Social Security" were distributed in May and contained advice about the severe hardship provision. The main leaflet, reprinted in October, contains the same information. Additionally, each young person who was likely to cease to be entitled to income support from 12 September was sent a copy of the supplement with the letter telling them that they would no longer be entitled in the normal way. A Department of Social Security press release giving full details was issued on 30 September.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest total of unemployed in Bradford, West; how many *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* people under 18 years are unemployed, according to the latest figures; and what were the comparable figures for this time in 1987.

Mr. Lee: The following information is in the Library. The table shows the number of unemployed claimants by sex and the number of unemployed claimants aged under 18 years in Bradford, West constituency for October 1987 and October 1988. The figures are affected by September's change in benefit regulations for under 18-year-olds.

Number of unemployed claimants in Bradford, West constituency in October 1987 and October 1988

	Unemployed claimants	
	October 1987	*October 1988*
Male	5,589	4,436
Female	1,943	1,369
Total	7,532	5,805
Of total those under 18	504	24

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* the actual and *(b)* the percentage fall in unemployment from August 1983 to August 1988 for each parliamentary constituency in Lancashire and Cumbria.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* The following information is in the Library. The table shows the actual and percentage change in unemployment from August 1983 to August 1988 for each parliamentary constituency in Lancashire and Cumbria, together with the corresponding levels of unemployment. The figures are affected by the change in the compilation of the count in March 1986 to reduce over-recording.

The change in the level of unemployment in the parliamentary constituencies of Lancashire and Cumbria between August 1983 and August 1988
Unemployed claimants

Parliamentary constituency	*August 1983*	*August 1988*	*Change*	*Percentage change*
Blackburn	7,593	5,580	−2,013	−26·51
Blackpool North	4,298	3,613	−685	−15·94
Blackpool South	3,993	3,549	−444	−11·12
Burnley	6,177	4,019	−2,158	−34·94
Chorley	4,502	3,071	−1,431	−31·79
Fylde	2,439	1,978	−461	−18·90
Hyndburn	4,234	2,884	−1,350	−31·88
Lancaster	3,319	2,614	−705	−21·24
Morecambe and Lunesdale	2,977	3,240	263	8·83
Pendle	4,569	3,060	−1,509	−33·03
Preston	7,495	5,395	−2,100	−28·02
Ribble Valley	1,870	1,532	−330	−18·07
Rossendale and Darwen	4,935	3,050	−1,885	−38·20
South Ribble	4,326	2,950	−1,376	−31·81
West Lancashire	[illegible],849	4,896	−1,953	−28·52
Wyre	3,795	2,796	−999	−26·32
Barrow and Furness	4,031	3,362	−669	−16·60
Carlisle	3,466	2,992	−474	−13·68
Copeland	3,860	3,046	−814	−21·09
Penrith and the Borders	2,775	2,186	−589	−21·23
Westmorland and Lonsdale	1,946	1,400	−546	−29·06
Workington	4,798	3,078	−1,720	−35·85

School Leavers (Bradford)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people under 18 years who left school during 1988 in Bradford have *(a)* obtained a YTS place; *(b)* are believed to have obtained employment or *(c)* obtained a YTS bridging allowance.

Mr. Cope: Further to my reply to the hon. Member on Thursday 3 November 1988, *Official Report*, column *655*, I am now in a position to give revised estimates for Bradford:

(a) By 26 November it is estimated that approximately 2,300 school leavers had obtained a YTS place.
(b) Some 2,000 school leavers had obtained employment by the same date.

Between 11 September and 10 November 938 young people had received bridging allowance.

Job Vacancies

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he proposes to write to the hon. Member for Oldham, West regarding publication of the findings of the research carried out by IFF into job vacancies mentioned in his February White Paper on training, referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Oldham, West of 15 November, *Official Report*, column *610*.

Mr. Fowler: I have now written to the hon. Member.

Training (Placements)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the number and proportion of trainees who are expected to gain work placements by the end of the first year of employment training.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 25 October 1988]:* Plans are for up to 60,000 trainees to join employment training (ET) in the first full year of the programme. All trainees should be offered a mix of directed training and practical training either on a project or on a placement with an employer as required by their individual action plans. The aim is for all ET trainees to benefit from training in a normal working environment.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest data on the number of people on employment training who have started work placement.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* Information on the number of people on employment training who have started on placements with employers is not available at present but should be available in January.

Labour Statistics (North-West Norfolk)

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest unemployment figure for north-west Norfolk.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* The following information is in the Library. On 13 October 1988 the number of unemployed claimants in the Norfolk, North-West parliamentary constituency was 2,461.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide figures for each year since

1979 for Scotland, Wales and each of the standard regions for *(a)* the total number of applications to industrial tribunals, *(b)* the total number of the above cases in which the applicant was successful and *(c)* the total cost of operating industrial tribunals.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 25 November 1988]*: The available information on the number of registered applications and the total cost of operating the tribunals for the calendar years 1979-85 is as follows:

	Applications Registered		*Annual Cost England and Wales and Scotland*
	England and Wales	*Scotland*	*£*
1979-80	34,225	4,768	5,998,000
1980-81	38,596	5,174	7,301,000
1981-82	39,193	4,810	8,346,000
1982-83	39,073	4,587	9,287,000
1983-84	35,890	4,069	9,880,000
1984-85	35,640	4,179	9,774,000

We have more detailed statistics for the regional offices of industrial tribunals in England and Wales and for Scotland for the financial years 1 April 1985 to 31 March 1988 as follows:

	1985-86	*1986-87*	[1]*1987-88*
Registered Applications			
London (South)	2,643	2,947	3,588
Bury St. Edmunds	1,974	1,647	1,719
Birmingham	3,566	3,279	2,356
Bristol	1,874	1,911	1,691
Cardiff	1,728	1,858	1,632
Leeds	2,402	2,135	4,295
Manchester	2,919	2,566	3,968
Newcastle	2,387	2,016	1,549
Nottingham	1,904	2,069	1,670
Sheffield[2]	1,536	1,504	NIL
Liverpool[2]	2,509	1,962	NIL
Southampton	1,543	1,515	1,992
London (North)	2,428	2,236	2,661
London (Central)[2]	4,836	6,941	NIL
Scotland	4,344	3,843	3,684
Total	38,593	38,429	30,543
Number of successful applications			
London (South)	307	312	405
Bury St. Edmunds	413	268	254
Birmingham	597	544	408
Bristol	215	268	224
Cardiff	227	228	217
Leeds	381	335	364
Manchester	427	347	486
Newcastle	432	538	285
Nottingham	296	287	215
Sheffield[3]	198	214	102
Liverpool[2]	312	347	NIL
Southampton	260	247	232
London (North)	346	398	372
London (Central)[2]	298	292	NIL
Scotland	696	707	627
Total	5,405	5,332	4,191
Tribunal Expenditure			
	£	£	£
London (South)	1,201,622	1,072,845	1,250,590
Bury St. Edmunds	588,266	665,002	626,769
Birmingham	903,776	945,079	931,568
Bristol	507,318	549,131	566,638
Cardiff	511,567	571,578	599,971
Leeds	650,217	676,256	1,103,130
Manchester	743,200	817,474	1,473,268
Newcastle	586,798	603,130	578,053
Nottingham	467,279	540,106	526,056
Sheffield[2]	415,915	465,753	Nil
Liverpool[2]	628,629	680,480	Nil
London (North)	1,158,352	963,731	978,660
London (Central)[2]	1,233,966	1,344,181	Nil
Scotland	1,410,100	1,467,399	1,656,100

[2] Nil return for 1988 due to closure of offices.

[1] Provisional figure.

SCOTLAND

Mental Illness

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many new mental illness hospital beds were opened and how many mental illness hospital beds closed in Scotland in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Details of all new hospital developments are not held centrally as minor capital projects are delegated to health boards. One major project, providing 120 new mental illness beds, was opened in 1988 at Parkhead psychiatric hospital.

Details are only held centrally on closures of complete hospitals; no mental illness hospitals were closed in 1988 but some health boards have reduced mental illness bed numbers as transfers to care in the community have taken place.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funds have been specifically earmarked for the care of the mentally ill following the closure of mental hospitals in Scotland in the last year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No mental illness hospital has been closed in Scotland in the last year.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what figure has been indicated to health boards for 1989-90 as payments under National Health Service Circular 1988 (Gen 18) towards the cost of projects making it possible for the mentally ill to return to or remain in the community; how the funds will be applied; and how many people will benefit.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Decisions have not yet been announced about expenditure levels in the National Health Service for 1989-90.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many residential places in the community will be provided in *(a)* the current and *(b)* the next year for those discharged from mental hospitals in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information is not available in the form requested. Data on the provision of residential places are included in annual statistical returns from local authorities on a retrospective basis but such returns do not extend to planned provision.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the mental illness hospitals scheduled to *(a)* open and *(b)* close in (i) the current and (ii) the next year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Parkhead psychiatric hospital phase II opened in November 1988. There are no plans to close any mental illness hospitals in the current and next year. Many health boards have plans to reduce the size of mental illness hospitals as places in the community become available.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research projects his Department is funding in the current year to test the effectiveness of community care for people suffering from schizophrenia psychoses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend is aware of research being undertaken into aspects of schizophrenia, but he is not funding any projects related to the effectiveness of community care for sufferers.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to how many of those convicted of crimes in Scotland in each of the last two years had previously been admitted to hospital with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received in the last year on the provision of community care for patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses discharged from National Health Service mental hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend receives representations from time to time on different aspects of community care, some of which make reference to the discharge of patients from mentel illness hospitals. The Government have consistently made it clear that we are committed to promoting a policy of care in the community for such groups as the mentally ill where such care is appropriate. Since 1979, we have increased substantially, in real terms, the money available to health boards and social work departments. On 1 June 1988 the social work services group issued detailed guidance to these authorities on arrangements for the discharge of people from mental illness and mental handicap hospitals.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much was spent by his Department last year on the care and treatment of patients suffering from schizophrenia; and what percentage each figure was of total expenditure on *(a)* mental and *(b)* all health services;

(2) how much was spent in Scotland in the last year on the care and treatment of patients suffering from schizophrenia; and what percentage that figure represented of total expenditure on *(a)* mental and *(b)* all health services;

(3) what is the current annual cost per patient to the National Health Service in Scotland of the care and treatment of patients with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to how many people discharged from mental illness hospitals in Scotland in the last year after a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses having been proved vulnerable homeless subsequently became voluntary homeless.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to how many people discharged from hospital following a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses and subsequently taken by the police under the Mental Health Act to hospital have been refused admission in Scotland in the last year for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of those convicted of crimes in Scotland in 1987 have ever been admitted to National Health Service mental illness hospitals and units with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not available.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy have been found in Scotland for each year since 1979; and what are the principal areas in which it has been found.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The first case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in the British Isles was identified in November 1986. The disease was made notifiable on 21 June 1988. there have been 35 confirmed cases in Scotland (all in 1988). With the exception of Fife these have occurred throughout all mainland regions, and in Shetland, the highest incidence being in Dumfries and Galloway where the disease has been identified on eight farms.

Nurses

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each health board the number of sisters/charge nurses employed in wards with a two charge nurse system.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Reprocessing Plant, Dounreay

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he proposes to announce his decision on the outcome of the local public inquiry into the proposed European demonstration reprocessing plant at Dounreay.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend is still considering the report of the public local inquiry into the proposed development and he is not yet in a position to predict a date for the announcement of his decision.

Nurses

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will clarify the entitlement of enrolled nurses in respect of *(a)* taking charge of a ward and *(b)* the administration of controlled drugs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 November 1988]*: Enrolled nurses may take charge of wards at management's discretion. Normally this will be on an ad hoc rather than a continuous basis and in situations where more highly qualified staff will be available to assist or take over at short notice. In determining new clinical grades for enrolled nurses, periods spent in charge of wards will have been taken into account by health boards. The administration of controlled drugs is controlled by the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 1985 (SI 1985 No 2066). Two staff are required to participate in order that all aspects of administration can be checked. It is permissible for employers to assign such work to enrolled nurses although they are recommended not to do so unless they have provided appropriate additional instruction and assessed the individual's knowledge and competence to perform the task. Such work is not, however, a factor in determining clinical grading.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Chief Constable

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will call for a report from the Police Authority of Northern Ireland as to what is the total cost of advertising the future vacancy of the post of Chief Constable.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Advertising the post of Chief Constable is a matter for the Police Authority for Northern Ireland. I understand, however, that the estimated cost is approximately £9,500.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the discharges and *(b)* the deaths by length of stay, including percentage change in numbers and percentage distribution, of patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses in Northern Ireland in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as set out:

Patients with diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses—discharges and deaths in 1987 by length of stay

Length of stay	*Discharges*		*Deaths*		*Total*	
	Number	*Per cent. Distribution*	*Number*	*Per cent. Distribution*	*Number*	*Per cent. Distribution*
Under 1 month	430	46	4	10	434	45
1 and less than 3 months	334	36	3	7	337	34
3 and less than 6 months	84	9	1	2	85	9
6 and less than 12 months	42	4	—	—	42	4
12 months or over	45	5	33	81	78	8
Total	935	100	41	100	976	100

The number of discharges and deaths was 0·5 per cent. lower in 1987 than 1986.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many current occupants of National Health Service hospital and unit beds in Northern Ireland have a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses; and what those figures are as a percentage of *(a)* mental and *(b)* all beds in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Information on current occupancy is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost from each of the psychiatric units in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the admissions by diagnosis and orders of admissions, including percentage changes in numbers and rates per 100,000 population, of patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses in Northern Ireland in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows:

Admissions of patients diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia psychoses during 1987

Number	*Percentage change since 1986*	*Rate per 100,000 population*
First admission		
133	+23·2	8
Total admissions		
968	+5·6	62

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were discharged from mental illness hospitals in Northern Ireland in the last year; and how many were admitted for a hospital stay more than once during the year.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
Discharges during 1987	935
Patients admitted to psychiatric hospitals more than once during 1987	159

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to how many people discharged from hospital following a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses and subsequently taken by the police under the Mental Health Act to hospital have been refused admission in Northern Ireland in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Needham: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost from each of the psychiatric units in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research projects his Department is funding in the current year to test the effectiveness of community care for people suffering from schizophrenia psychoses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: None.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were discharged from mental illness hospitals in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and how many of them were taken into local authority residential care.

Mr. Needham: Information requested on discharges is as set out:

Year	*Number of discharges*
1987	935
1986	981
1985	1,120
1984	1,096
1983	1,037

Information on the number of discharged patients taken into statutory residential care is not available centrally.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to how many of those convicted of crimes in Northern Ireland in each of the last two years had previously been admitted to National Health Service mental hospitals with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information sought is not available in the form requested. However, in Northern Ireland the number of offenders who were made subject to restriction orders under article 47 of the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and were thereby detained in hospital for treatment for schizophrenia pychoses in each of the last two years was as follows:

	Number
1986	3
1987	1

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much was spent in Northern Ireland in the last year on the care and treatment of patients suffering from schizophrenia; and what percentage that figure represented of total expenditure on *(a)* mental and *(b)* all health services;

(2) what is the current annual cost per patient to the National Health Service in Northern Ireland of the care and treatment of patients with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses;

(3) what information he has as to how many people discharged from mental illness hospitals in Northern Ireland in the last year after a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses having been proved vulnerable homeless subsequently became voluntary homeless.

Mr. Needham: The information is not available.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received in the last year on the provision of community care for patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses discharged from National Health Service mental hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The director of the National Schizophrenia Fellowship has written to me seeking my support for early-day motions concerning hospital closures and the provision of appropriate community services for sufferers from schizophrenia who have been discharged from hospital. I replied explaining that no hospital closures were planned in Northern Ireland and that additional community services were being developed to support the needs of discharged patients. I stressed the importance of active co-operation between the statutory and voluntary sectors in creating the necessary community services.

Mental Illness

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new mental illness hospital beds were opened and how many closed in Northern Ireland in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Needham: This information is not available in the form requested. The net figure for beds available in mental illness hospitals (that is adjusted to take account of beds opened and closed) for 1987 was 4,163.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funds have been specifically earmarked for the care of the mentally ill following the closure of mental hospitals in Northern Ireland in the last year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: No psychiatric hospitals have been closed in Northern Ireland during the last year.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many residential places in the community will be provided in *(a)* the current and *(b)* the next year for those discharged from mental hospitals in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: This information is not held centrally. Local provision of living accommodation available for those discharged from mental hospitals comprises a wide range of residential types including hostels, group homes, residential and nursing homes and private accommodation run by individual carers. This range of accommodation is operated by the statutory, private and voluntary sectors and is not necessarily solely for those discharged from mental hospitals.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the mental illness hospitals scheduled to *(a)* open and *(b)* close in (i) the current and (ii) the next year in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: There are no plans either to open or close any mental hospitals in Northern Ireland in 1988 or 1989.

Security

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the security statistics for the first half of 1988 are now available, together with the details of persons charged with terrorist-type offences and convictions for scheduled offences for the year.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Security statistics for the first half of 1988 are now available and are as follows. Statistics for earlier years are contained in the answer by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on 8 March 1988, at columns *67-74*.

Statistics on Security (January-June 1988)

Part I—Statistics of Terrorist Activity

	Number
Shooting Incidents[1]	161 (107)
Explosions	109
Bombs Neutralised	107
Weight of Explosives in lbs[2]	1,681
Explosions Neutralised	3,104
Armed Robberies	332
Amount Stolen	749,640
Malicious Fires	287
Deaths:	
Civilian	18
Army/UDR	18
RUC/RUC 'R'	2
Injuries:	
Civilian	319
Army/UDR	88
RUC/RUC 'R'	107

[1] Figures in ( ) refer to shots heard only and are not included in the total.

[2] Estimated weight only.

Part II—Statistics of Security Forces' Activity

	Number
Houses Searched	2,208
Finds:	
Firearms	339
Ammunition (rounds)	72,809
Explosives	4,102

Persons Charged with Terrorist-type Offences

	Number
Murder	12
Attempted Murder	15
Firearms Offences	63
Explosives Offences	14
Theft Act	20
Other	93
Total	217

Statistics on Security (Part III)

Convictions and Sentences for Scheduled Offences

January-June 1988

Notes on the tables

1. The offence classifications are based on those used by the Crown and peace office in their annual return.

2. The tables relate to persons convicted at the Belfast Crown court. This covers all scheduled offences tried on indictment.

3. Some jury trials are included in cases where the Attorney-General certified out of the scheduled mode of trial, ie non-terrorist serious offences.

4. Where a person had been convicted of more than one offence only the most serious or that which received the longest sentence is recorded in the statistics.

Conviction and sentences for scheduled offences

Offence	*Number convicted (January-June 1988)*			*Sentence (January-June 1988)*						
	1988	*Non-custodial sentence*	*Young offenders centre training schools*	*Less than 5 years*	*5 years and less than 7 years*	*7 years and less than 10 years*	*10 years and less than 15 years*	*15 years and less than 20 years*	*20 years and over*	*Life*
Murder	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Attempted murder	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Conspiracy to murder	9	1	0	1	0	2	3	1	1	0
Manslaughter	3	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm	8	3	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Causing grievous bodily harm	7	0	1	0	3	3	0	0	0	0
Assault occasioning grevous bodily harm	11	5	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Causing explosion	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Placing explosives	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Possessing explosives with intent	11	4	0	2	1	1	1	2	0	0
Other explosives offences	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Possessing a firearm with intent	23	13	1	5	2	1	1	0	1	0
Possessing a firearm	6	2	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0
Carrying a firearm with intent	4	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0
Other major firearms offences	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Major firearms offences	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Robbery	140	51	15	36	17	17	4	0	0	0
Aggravated robbery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Membership of illegal organisations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Attempted robbery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Soliciting support for proscribed organisations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unlawful collection of information	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Illegal training	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kidnaping and false imprisonment	13	0	0	0	13	0	0	0	0	0
Blackmail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contributing to rescurces of a proscribed organisation	7	4	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Burglary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Aggravated burglary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hijacking	11	10	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Attempted hijacking	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Arson	40	33	3	2	0	2	0	0	0	0
Possession of an offensive weapon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Petrol bomb offences	13	9	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Escape offences	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Criminal damage	5	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	Number convicted (January-June 1988)			*Sentence (January-June 1988)*						
Offence	*1988*	*Non-custodial sentence*	*Young offenders centre training schools*	*Less than 5 years*	*5 years and less than 7 years*	*7 years and less than 10 years*	*10 years and less than 15 years*	*15 years and less than 20 years*	*20 years and over*	*Life*
Intimidation	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assisting offenders	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Withholding information	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Possessing prohibited articles	4	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Conspiracy to arm terrorists	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common law riot	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	338	152	32	61	37	34	13	3	2	4

ENERGY

Research and Development

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what funds his Department has allocated in 1988-89 and 1989-90 for research on *(a)* nuclear energy, *(b)* hydro-electric power, *(c)* wave power and *(d)* wind power;

(2) what is the total budget in 1988-89 and 1989-90 for research on alternative forms of electricity generation to nuclear and coal.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Estimated expenditure by my Department in 1988-89 on the named research and development programmes will be as follows:

	£ million
Nuclear Energy	144·57
of which:	
Fast reactor	76·61
Fusion	22·46
Nuclear Safety	22·57
Radioactive Waste and Nuclear Materials Management	6·38
Other Nuclear Research	16·55
Hydro-electric Power	0·15
Wave Power	0·15
Wind Power	4·30

Estimated expenditure in 1988-89 on research and development on alternative forms of electricity generation is £5·65 million, covering programmes of work on hydroelectricity, tidal, wave, and wind. In addition, expenditure of £4·75 million is expected on programmes (biomass, geothermal) for energy sources which could be used either to provide heat or to generate electricity.

Expenditure forecasts for 1989-90 will be published in the 1989 public expenditure White Paper early in the new year.

Greenhouse Effect

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what research has been commissioned, or is planned, on the role of nuclear power, energy conservation and renewable energy sources in reducing carbon dioxide emissions and the greenhouse effect; if he will list any such studies which have been published; if he will place copies in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department has been discussing with the energy technology support unit a study to assess the impact of energy efficiency on emission of CO_2 and other pollutants. This will involve identification of the differing roles of nuclear power, renewables and conventional sources in emissions of CO_2 and other pollutants. It is the intention that this work will begin before the end of the year. This work will build on a preliminary analysis of those technologies which could have importance in reducing CO_2 emissions, published in 1986 in energy paper 54 (Energy Technologies for the UK 1986 Appraisal of Research, Development and Demonstration), a copy of which is in the Library.

Dounreay (New Plant)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has regarding the total combined cost to British Nuclear Fuels plc and the Atomic Energy Authority in respect of the local public inquiry into their application to build the European demonstration reprocessing plant at Dounreay.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have asked the chairman of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority to write on behalf of both the authority and BNFL to the hon. Member concerning the costs of the local public inquiry.

ENVIRONMENT

Unleaded Petrol

86. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he proposes to promote the use of unleaded petrol.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Measures to promote the use of unleaded petrol are co-ordinated by the unleaded petrol group, which I chair. The steps being taken by the Government include the distribution of a leaflet on unleaded petrol with vehicle licence reminders.

House of Commons (Lighting)

87. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to improve the lighting in the House of Commons Chamber.

Mr. Chope: There has been no request from the House to improve the lighting in the Chamber. I am aware, however, that the Select Committee on televising the House has been considering the levels of lighting and, like the hon. Member, I saw the presentation in the Chamber on 21 November.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the lighting under the House of Commons Galleries is to be renewed.

Mr. Chope: There are no plans to renew the lighting under the Galleries in the foreseeable future as part of my Department's programme of maintenance work.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to restore the chandeliers which were used to light the House before 1941.

Mr. Chope: I do not have information as to whether the chandeliers previously in the Chamber survived the bombing in 1941.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the level of lighting in the House.

Mr. Chope: At present there are no plans to do so.

Shareholdings (Councillors)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to tighten the current regulations regarding the declaration of shareholdings by local authority councillors; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The White Paper on "Conduct of Local Authority Business" (Cm. 433) sets out the Government's plans for strengthening the statutory controls on councillors' pecuniary interests, such as shareholdings. These involve legislating to require local authorities to set up a register of pecuniary interests. Failure to declare information for the register or provision of incorrect information would be a criminal offence.

The register will serve to reinforce, but not replace, the current legislation which requires that a councillor must disclose any pecuniary interest in a matter coming before the council. The current disabilities on speaking and voting will remain as the main safeguard, with the Secretary of State retaining the power to grant dispensations.

We have set up a working group with the local authority associations to consider the scope of the register, but it is envisaged that company interests such as shareholdings would be covered.

Sewage Works

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each water authority in England the number of sewage works in breach of numerical discharge consents in the 12 months before and the 12 months after the introduction of relaxed methods of measurement notified to chief executives in a letter from his Department of 28 January 1985.

Mr. Ridley: Water authorities were required to supply detailed returns on non-compliant works only for the calendar year 1986. The necessary information to supply an answer to this question is therefore not available.

However, inquiries of water authorities in 1984 suggested that in England as a whole up to 60 per cent. of works were failing their consents in that year. A detailed breakdown of this figure was not given. The returns for 1987, which were placed in the Libraries of both Houses in June this year, show that this has been reduced to 20·7 per cent.

Radioactivity

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes writing to the hon. Member for Copeland about reports of abnormally high levels of atmospheric radioactivity in the Greater Manchester area on 28 October.

Mr. Ridley: I shall be writing shortly.

Water Authorities

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the dates of appointment of each board member of the 10 water authorities in England and Wales.

Mr. Ridley: The information requested for the nine regional water authorities in England is as follows:

Board Member	*Date of first appointment*
Anglian Water Authority	
B. V. Henderson, CBE (chairman)	1 October 1981
Miss A. C. Abbey	1 October 1983
J. V. Boodle	1 January 1979
Dr. J. R. G. Bradfield, CBE	21 November 1975
P. F. Bullock	1 July 1986
Dr. Jane P. Carmichael	1 May 1987
F. Cator	1 October 1988
Earl of Cranbrook, DL	1 May 1987
C. J. Groome	1 October 1983
J. S. Martin, CBE	1 October 1988
A. G. Semple	1 April 1987
J. A. Simpson	1 July 1986
A. F. Smith	1 October 1983
P.H. Tombleson, OBE	1 October 1983
Northumbrian Water Authority	
Sir Michael Straker, Kt, CBE (Chairman)	1 October 1982
D. G. Cranston	1 October 1986
T. Harrison	1 July 1988
Dr. R. Iley	1 January 1979
Mrs J. Johnson	1 January 1981
D. R. C. Kelly	1 October 1983
Prof M. B. Pescod, OBE	1 October 1986
N. J. B. Prynn	28 September 1979
W. F. Ridley	1 October 1983
P. L. Tennant	27 October 1986
E. A. Wrangham	3 August 1973
J. S. Ward	1 July 1988
North West Water Authority	
W. D. Grove (Chairman)	1 October 1985
B. Alexander	1 July 1986
T. A. F. Barnes	1977
Mrs. M. C. Bolton	1 January 1988
J. A. Cropper, DL	1976
Dr. M. R. Dyer	1 October 1988
J. B. Oldfield	1 October 1983
A. G. Pendleton	1 August 1987
J. B. Robinson	1 October 1981
F. Sanderson	1 October 1983
Hon. W. R. F. Vane	1 April 1987
Severn-Trent Water Authority	
J. G. Bellak (Chairman)	1 June 1982
J. E. Anthony	1 October 1983
R. H. Boissier	1 October 1986
V. Cocker	1 October 1988
F. Earnshaw	1 November 1985
C. G. Hawthorne	23 August 1973
A. W. Henn	1 October 1986
T. C. Heywood-Lonsdale	1 October 1983
F. A. Jennings	1973
C. G. McMillan	1 October 1983
R. J. H. Parkes, BEM	1 October 1983

Board Member	*Date of first appointment*
R. S. Paul	1 October 1988
A. H. Simon	1 October 1986
B. P. Zissman	1 October 1983
Southern Water Authority	
W. J. W. Courtney, CBE (Chairman)	14 August 1985
D. J. Arnold	1981
Lord Chapple of Hoxton	1 October 1983
P. A. Girle	1 November 1986
H. J. L. Harris	1 October 1983
A. Humbert	1 October 1983
F. Midmer	1 October 1988
Rear-Admiral D. G. Spickernell, CB	1 February 1987
B. R. Thorpe, CBE	1 October 1983
Dr. J. M. Westhead	1 July 1988
South West Water Authority	
K. Court (Chairman)	1 August 1987
S. J. Day	1 October 1983
Lady Mary Holborow	31 March 1980
Dr. J. R. Lawrence	1 October 1985
G. C. Manning	1 April 1976
D. Mitchell	1977
Sir Kenneth Sharp, Kt. TD	1 October 1987
C. Stuart	1 October 1987
R. E. Trenerry	1 October 1983
Thames Water Authority	
R Watts, CBE (Chairman)	1 October 1983
R Clarke	1 July 1988
M Davies	1 October 1977
Sir Peter Harrop, KCB	1 October 1986
Sir Christopher Leaver, GBE	1 October 1983
H P Parry	1982
J M Thomson	1 November 1984
E J Worlidge	1 July 1988
Wessex Water Authority	
W N Hood (Chairman)	1 October 1987
R H Baker	1 October 1977
Dr. A K Barbour, OBE	1 October 1983
Lady Digby, DL	1 October 1983
R Huntington	1 October 1988
R D Kent	1 July 1988
D N A McLure	1 October 1986
J M Mills TD, DL	1973
K F Roberts, CBE	1 October 1983
C Skellett	1 October 1988
A R Thornhill	1 July 1988
Yorkshire Water Authority	
G P Jones (Chairman)	1 October 1983
J D Bell	1 October 1988
J P Coverdale, OBE	23 August 1973
D Cramb, CBE	1 October 1986
J A Fawcett	1 October 1983
B P Hogg	1 October 1986
T Jackson	12 October 1983
T Newton	1 October 1988
Mrs P V Smith, OBE	1 June 1982
A Ward	1 October 1988

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is responsible for appointments to the board of the Welsh water authority.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will adjust the external financing limits of water authorities in the current financial year to enable them to buy shares in statutory water companies.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Public Housing

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on what steps he proposes to take in the light of the proposals by Ealing, Brent, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham councils to use ratepayers' revenue for public housing on a rotation basis to avoid proposed capital controls on council expenditure; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Under the Local Government (Prescribed Expenditure) (Consolidation and Amendment) Regulations 1987, as subsequently amended, local authorities will usually not incur prescribed expenditure when acquiring leasehold interests in residential property for periods not exceeding three years. The Government have no plans to change this. A new capital finance system is, however, to be introduced, subject to the approval of Parliament, with effect from 1990-91. We are considering the appropriate treatment for forward commitments entered into by local authorities between the publication of our proposals on 7 July and the commencement of the new system.

Football Matches (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on how many matches took place at Nottingham Forest and Notts County in 1987-88; how many individuals were arrested; and what is the average in the respective leagues.

Mr. Moynihan: The following information relates to Football League matches played in the 1987-88 season:

	Nottingham Forest	*Notts County*
Matches	20	23
Arrests	130	56
Average arrests per match	6·5	2·4
Average arrests per match by Division	5·3 (Division 1)	1·5 (Division 3)

Council House Sales

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals under the right-to-buy scheme have been made by Nottingham council tenants in each year since the scheme began; and in how many cases the valuation was reduced on appeal.

Mr. Trippier: The table gives, for each year since 1980, the number of tenants of Nottingham city council who applied for determination of the value of their homes by the district valuer under what is now section 128 of the Housing Act 1985 and the number of these cases in which the valuation was reduced:

Year	*Number of applications for determination*	*Number of valuations reduced*
1980	14	8
1981	12	5
1982	6	4
1983	2	2
1984	9	3
1985	19	n/a
1986	22	7
1987	6	3
1988[1]	13	2

n/a—not available

[1] To date

Carbon Monoxide (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times carbon monoxide levels in Nottingham's air have exceeded World Health Organisation guidelines *(a)* since records were kept and *(b)* in the last three years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am not aware of any consistent series of carbon monoxide measurements having been made in Nottingham. The Department's programme of urban monitoring includes a site in central London. Concentrations of carbon monoxide at that site just reached the guidelines values of the World Health Organisation during the month of November due to the cold, anti-cyclonic weather conditions. Analysis of results for the whole of the previous year show that at no other time were the WHO guideline levels approached. Traffic is the dominant source of urban carbon monoxide. It is unlikely that conditions in Nottingham approach those in London.

Water Purity (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the level of *(a)* polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, *(b)* nitrates, *(c)* aluminium and *(d)* other substances in Nottingham's drinking water.

Mr. Moynihan: I am advised that a recent survey of the city of Nottingham water supply has revealed no significant level of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. Further monitoring is in hand.

None of Nottingham's water supplies regularly exceeds the limit for nitrate, aluminium or other substances set in the EC drinking water directive.

Eels (Dieldrin)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the current level of dieldren in eels in the Severn-Trent water authority.

Mr. Moynihan: There was considerable concern about the relatively high concentrations of dieldrin in eels from the river Avon in 1985, following deaths of herons living around the river. However, eels taken from rivers in the area in 1988 had lower concentrations of dieldrin in their muscle than the eels taken in previous years. This is consistent with the results of river water monitoring, which shows a continuing trend downwards to extremely low levels. Present levels of dieldrin in river waters are normally below 5 nanogrammes per litre.

Water Privatisation

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will lay before Parliament information regarding *(a)* the state of the sewage system, *(b)* the state of the drinking water system, *(c)* the levels of contamination of water used for drinking purposes or for irrigation, *(d)* the main sources of water pollution and *(e)* the commercial value of land owned by the water authorities in the United Kingdom prior to the debate on the legislation on the privatisation of the water industry.

Mr. Moynihan: On 20 July my right hon. Friend laid before Parliament the annual report and accounts of the nine regional water authorities in which these matters are properly dealt with and he expects to present the 1988-89 reports and accounts in the same way during the summer.

Richmond House

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, when the Richmond house building was planned, it was intended to accommodate all Department of Health and Social Security staff; how much office space is currently unoccupied in the Richmond house building; and what is the total estimate cost of building, furnishing and equipping the Richmond house building.

Mr. Chope: A Government office building on the Richmond yard site has been planned for many years. Plans for a completely new building were rejected by a public inquiry in the realy 1970s. Successive Governments have since accepted the principle recommended by the inquiry that the facade and some rooms of Richmond terrace should be preserved with a modern office building constructed behind.

The decision to proceed was taken in 1978 and preliminary contracts were commissioned in 1979 and later years. The main management contract was placed in 1983. The building was designed to be suitable for use by any Government Department. It was allocated to the Department of Health and Social Security in April 1987 to accommodate the Department's Ministers and those staff who are needed in frequent and immediate support of Minist[illegible]. Richmond house is fully occupied.

The final cost of the building will depend on settlement of the final account, including claims still being negotiated.

Further work to meet the particular requirements of the occupying departments, together with the furnishing and equipping of the building, is their own responsibility.

Community Trusts

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek to make it illegal for local authorities to allocate to voluntary organisations funds made available by central Government under section 11 and the urban programme to community trusts.

Mr. Trippier: My Department's urban programme grants are used to reimburse local authorities for expenditure which they incur under the Local Government Grants (Social Need) Act 1969 and the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978. My Department approves projects for urban programme support only if they meet the ministerial guidelines for the urban programme issued in May 1985, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. The administration of section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many community trusts are operating in the United Kingdom at present; what is their composition; what are their main functions; who is responsible for authorising their constitutions and operation; what annual report and accounts are community trusts required to publish; and where local authorities fund a community trust, what rights they have to recommend funding be granted or refused.

Mr. Trippier: Community trusts are voluntary organisations about which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department can advise. A local authority has a wide range of powers which it can use to fund voluntary organisations.

General Development Order

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the criteria that he uses in exercising power under article 10 of the town and country planning General Development Order 1977.

Mr. Chope: The power of direction under article 10(1) of the GDO is used sparingly, and normally only when more time is needed for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to decide whether or not to call in a particular planning application for his own decision. The criteria for directions under article 10(2) (as inserted by the Town and Country Planning General Development (Amendment) Order 1988) are set out in DOE Circular 15/88.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many members of the board of the National Rivers Authority will be required to be *(a)* experts or scientists with experience of research on water systems, drinking water, irrigation, sewage, transport, and so on, *(b)* members of environmental organisations and *(c)* representatives of consumers associations in his legislation proposals for water privatisation.

Mr. Moynihan: The intention is that the board of the National Rivers Authority should comprise a range of people with experience or knowledge relevant to the work of the authority, but there will be no requirement for specified numbers of people with any particular expertise or backgrounds, or representing particular interests.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what specific powers his proposals for water privatisation will give to the National Rivers Authority to *(a)* prosecute polluters of drinking water and irrigation systems, *(b)* compensate the victims of damage suffered through polluted waters, *(c)* control the prices charged by water companies to users, whether domestic or industrial, and *(d)* effectively ensure the purity and quality of water.

Mr. Moynihan: The Water Bill gives the National Rivers Authority powers to maintain and enhance the quality of inland, coastal and underground waters (clauses 96-116). The authority and the Secretary of State will have a duty under clause 99 to take all practicable steps to achieve water quality objectives set by the Secretary of State (clause 98). The functions of the National Rivers Authority do not extend to securing drinking water quality. The authority will regulate polluting discharges to water through a consent system (clause 101 and schedule 11) and it will be an offence (clause 100) to discharge effluent in breach of a prohibition. There are powers for water protection zones in clause 104 and for byelaws to prevent the pollution of controlled waters in clause 106.

The Bill's provisions do not affect the common law rights of riparian owners or other affected parties to take action against any person polluting water in respect of which they have rights.

The Secretary of State has powers to define in regulations standards of wholesomeness for drinking water (clause 62). Under clause 19 he may take enforcement action against water undertakers who fail to comply with the duty imposed on them to supply only wholesome water for domestic purposes (clause 49). In addition clause 51 makes it an offence for water undertakers to supply to any premises by means of pipes water which is unfit for human consumption.

The obligation to comply with a final or provisional enforcement order under clause 19 is a duty owed to any person who may be affected by a contravention of the order, and loss or damage would be actionable at the suit of that person (clause 21(4) and (5)). This is in addition to their rights under consumer legislation and other enactments.

Clause 6 places a duty on the Secretary of State and the Director-General of Water Services to ensure that the interests of both domestic and industrial customers are protected as respects, among other things, charges for the services provided by water undertakers. Clause 13 will enable price controls to be imposed on water undertakers as one of the conditions of their appointment.

These provisions apply in England and Wales.

Water Byelaws

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the new water byelaws will come into operation.

Mr. Howard: Following careful consideration of representations made about certain aspects of the new water byelaws they have been confirmed with some minor modifications. They will come into operation on 1 January 1989.

River Quality Objectives

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what date he intends that river quality objectives should become statutory; and when he intends to initiate a comprehensive review of the current non-statutory water authority river quality objectives as a precursor to such statutory objectives being set.

Mr. Moynihan: Once it is established the National Rivers Authority will begin the task of reviewing the existing river quality objectives set by the water authorities, in the light of perceived national priorities for improving river and estuary quality and planned investment by water utilities and industrial dischargers. At the same time, it will need to consider how far the existing river classification scheme needs to be modified in order to improve the measurement of water quality. In the light of this review, and following public consultation, the Secretary of State expects to set revised objectives on a statutory basis during 1992.

Special Scientific Interest Sites

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the name and the county of the 51 sites of special scientific interest that were damaged by agricultural activities between 1 April 1987 and 31 March 1988; if he will detail what the damaging activity was for each site; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

Pollution Inspectorate

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the letter from Rod Perryman giving the reasons for his resignation from his post as head of his Department's pollution inspectorate.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* No. It is not customary to disclose documents concerned with personnel matters.

Water Pollution

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take action to ensure that all breaches of European Commission directives by the Yorkshire water authority in respect of mercury and cadmium in river sediment are required to be reported to that authority's water quality advisory group.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* It is for Yorkshire water authority to decide what information it supplies to its water quality advisory group.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking in respect of the breaches by the Yorkshire water authority of European Commission directives concerning mercury and cadmium in river sediment and pollution by the pesticide Lindane.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* On the basis of the periodic returns supplied by Yorkshire water authority, the Department does not consider that the requirements of the relevant European Community directives governing discharges of these substances have been breached.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the discharges of significant quantities of restricted chemicals into the river system by Hickson and Welch Ltd., Castleford, Staveley Chemicals, Chesterfield, Coalite Ltd., Bolsover and Thomas Bolton and Johnson Ltd., Wakefield.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* None recently, but I am aware of the concern over some industrial effluents being discharged into Yorkshire rivers. Representations about particular effluents would generally be made to the Yorkshire water authority which is responsible for controlling industrial discharges to rivers in its area. I understand that the water authority is investigating these and other industrial discharges with a view to securing improvements.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research is currently being conducted by his Department into the illegal contamination of water by pesticides.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* The following research is currently being conducted by the Department into the contamination of water by pesticides.

1. Effects of disinfection on organics in drinking water. Contractor-Water Research Centre (WRC). End date March 1989. Contract amount £343,000.
2. Pesticides in drinking water; sources and supplies. Contractor-WRC. End date December 1989. Contract amount £168,000.
3. Groundwater pollution by organic solvents. Contractor-NERC/British Geological Survey. End date March 1989. Contract amount £128,000.
4. Analysis of potentially dangerous substances in United Kingdom waters. Contractor-SAC Scientific. End date March 1989. Contract amount £27,000.
5. Sources and fates of synthetic organics. Contractor-WRC. End date March 1990. Contract amount £181,000.
6. Standards for dangerous substances in surface waters. Contractor-WRC. End date March 1989. Contract amount £197,000.
7. Total impact assessment of pollutants in river basins. Contractor-NERC/Institute of Hydrology. End date June 1989. Contract amount £163,000.
8. Organic contaminants in rivers. Contractor-WRC. End date March 1990. Contract amount £276,000.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence his Department has concerning the illegal contamination of water supplies by pesticides.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* Routine monitoring by water undertakers has revealed minute traces of pesticides in some drinking water supplies. Government medical advisers are satisfied that the levels found do not constitute a health risk.

As far as I am aware the levels arise from the use of pesticides approved under the control of pesticides regulations. I have no evidence to suggest that contamination arises from the illegal use of pesticides.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government to the European Commission regarding the pesticide standard within the drinking water directive.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* The Government consider that the pesticide parameter in the EC drinking water directive is not scientifically based, and is impracticable for a number of reasons. On several occasions since 1985 the Government have made representations to the Commission for a review.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will as a matter of urgency introduce legislation to provide for a prohibition power to enable water authorities to stop polluters from discharging effluent into water courses.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 25 November 1988]*: It is a criminal offence under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 to discharge polluting effluent into a water course without a consent from a water authority or the Secretary of State.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will as a matter of urgency bring forward legislation to ensure that polluters are given a duty to notify all new pollutants in their effluent to the responsible water authority, to enable water authorities to revise the consent without financial penalty.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 25 November 1988]*: No. Such legislation would be redundant. A discharger who adds to his discharge a new pollutant which materially adds to the noxious quality of the discharge, and which is not covered by the consent, will be guilty of an offence. Before adding such a pollutant he must therefore secure from the water authority a variation to the consent. The water authority will suffer no financial penalty if it varies or refuses to vary the consent.

Opencast Coalmining

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of opencast coalmining planning applications that have been made, approved and refused in 1987-88 and the four previous years for each region of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 25 November 1988]*: This information is not held centrally. Statistics compiled by the County Planning Officers' Society, which are available from 1984-85 only, show the following:

	1984-85	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Scotland				
Number of applications	13	33	25	25
approved	8	25	17	21
refused	5	8	8	4
North East				
Number of applications	13	31	25	25
approved	8	14	15	13
refused	5	17	10	12
North West				
Number of applications	1	9	5	2
approved	1	6	2	1
refused	—	3	3	1
Central West				
Number of applications	5	11	8	9
approved	4	5	5	8
refused	1	6	3	1
Central East				
Number of applications	4	16	22	13
approved	2	12	11	9
refused	2	4	11	5
South West				
Number of applications	12	11	16	16
approved	6	6	12	8
refused	6	5	4	8
Total				
Number of applications	48	111	101	90
approved	29	68	62	60
refused	19	43	39	30

War Dead (Disposal)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps will be taken in the event of war to prevent the pollution of water supplies arising from the disposal of the dead.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 25 November 1988]*: The staff of water undertakers and local authorities would implement planning arrangements designed to prevent pollution of water supplies arising from the disposal of the dead in wartime.

EC Directive

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what efforts have been made to meet the standards as set out in directive 80/778/EEC; what are the current difficulties encountered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 25 November 1988]*: Considerable efforts have been made, and will continue to be made, to meet the standards set out in the EC drinking water directive (Directive 80/778/EEC). Since the directive was agreed in 1980 water authorities and water companies have undertaken substantial programmes of improvement. In 1987-88 alone water authorities spent £400 million on their water supply functions. Programmes of improvements and investment will continue when the water industry is privatised. Current difficulties stem from the fact that some of the requirements relating to the parameters in the directive and their interpretation do not have a sound technical basis or take account of the practical circumstances of the water treatment and distribution systems.

Public water supplies in the United Kingdom are safe to drink. Good progress continues to be made towards full compliance with the directive. Most public water supplies for which derogations have been granted by the Department or sought from the European Commission are expected to comply over the next few years.

HEALTH

Contraceptives

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice he is giving to women who make inquiries to his Department on how they can obtain information on whether they were at any time fitted with a Dalkon shield intra uterine device;

(2) whether he has issued guidance to health authorities and family practitioner committees on assisting women who make inquiries to obtain information on whether they were at any time fitted with a Dalkon shield intra uterine device.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will reconsider its position not to launch a public information campaign to inform women of any rights they may have in regard to any injuries caused by the Dalkon shield contraceptive device.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 25 November 1988]*: We have no plans to initiate a public information campaign in relation to this matter of litigation in the United States courts. Publicity conducted in the United Kingdom by the Dalkon shield manufacturers has been approved by the courts concerned.

Our guidance to health authorities about the release of information in the context of civil legal proceedings is contained in HC(82)16, a copy of which is available in the Library. We have referred to that guidance in response to enquiries about the disclosure of records on the use of the Dalkon shield in individual cases.

In the case of family practitioner services, patients' medical records are held by general practitioners in the majority of cases. The General Medical Council issues guidance to doctors on the circumstances in which it is appropriate for confidential medical information to be released. We have received no inquiries about the provision of information by GPs to specific patients about their use of the Dalkon shield.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list *(a)* the discharges and *(b)* the deaths, by length of stay, including percentage change in numbers and percentage distribution, of patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses for the last year for which figures are available;

(2) how many current occupants of National Health Service hospital and unit beds have a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses in each health region; and what those figures are as a percentage of *(a)* mental and *(b)* all hospital beds in each region;

(3) if he will list the admissions by diagnosis and order of admissions, including percentage change in numbers and rates per 100,000 population, of patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses in each health region in the last year for which figures are available;

(4) how many patients with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were discharged from mental illness hospitals in each health region last year; and how many were admitted for a hospital stay of more than once during the year;

(5) how many people with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were discharged from mental illness hospitals in England in each of the last five years; and how many of them were taken into local authority residential care in the same year.

Mrs. Currie: The latest available information on people with schizophrenia in National Health Service mental illness hospitals and units is contained in the Department's statistical bulletin 1/86 "Mental illness hospitals and units in England: Schizophrenia Statistics 1981-84" and statistical note 2/88 "Mental illness hospitals and units in England: Schizophrenia Statistics 1984-86"; copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what research projects his Department is funding in the current year to test the effectiveness of community care for people suffering from schizophrenia psychoses; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The Department of Health's directly commissioned health and personal social services research programme includes the following current projects:

Title	*Researcher(s) and Location*
(i) Assessment of needs of chronic schizophrenics living in the health district of Harrow;	Dr. E. Johnson and Dr. H. I. Hershon, Northwick Park Hospital
(ii) A comparison of day and in patient treatment	Dr. F. Creed, Manchester Royal Infirmary
(iii) Compulsory treatment of psychiatric patients in the community	Professor S. R. Hirsch and Dr. T. E. Sensky, Department of Psychiatry, Charing Cross Hospital
(iv) Research on management of schizophrenics in the community;	Dr. G. Wilkinson and Dr. I. Falloon, Institute of Psychiatry, Denmark Hill, London
(v) A controlled evaluation of community psychiatric care;	Dr. T. Burns, Department of Psychiatry, St. George's Hospital Medical School
(vi) Evaluating the transition from psychiatric hospitals to District based services. (Part funding from Department of Health)	Professor J. P. Leff, MRC Social Psychiatry Unit.
(vii) Controlled trial of a daily living programme versus standard psychiatric care;	Professor I. Marks, Institute of Psychiatry
(viii) Interface between primary care and hospital based mental illness services;	Professor D. Goldberg, Department of Psychiatry, University of Manchester
(ix) Early brief versus sustained neuroleptic treatment in the maintenance phase of schizophrenia	Professor S. R. Hirsch, Department of Psychiatry, Charing Cross and Westminster Medical School

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much was spent in England and Wales in the last year on the care and treatment of patients suffering from schizophrenia; and what percentage that figure represented of total expenditure on *(a)* mental and *(b)* all health services;

(2) what is the current annual cost per patient to the National Health Service of the care and treatment of patients with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses.

Mrs. Currie: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received in the last year on the provision of community care for patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses discharged from National Health Service mental hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: We have received representation from a variety of sources, some of which reflect concern about the level of services available in some localities. Over the next year, the Government will be looking closely at local levels of provision.

Mental Illness Beds

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many new mental illness hospital beds have been opened and how many mental illness hospital beds closed in each health authority in England and Wales in the last year for which figures are available;

(2) what information he has as to how many people discharged from hospital following a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses and subsequently taken by the police under the Mental Health Act to hospital have been refused admission, in the last year for which figures are available;

(3) what information he has as to how many people discharged from mental illness hospitals in England in the last year after a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses having been proved vulnerable homeless subsequently became voluntary homeless.

Mrs. Currie: I regret that we do not hold centrally figures for the number of mental illness beds closed and the number of new beds opened each year, but the table shows the number of available staffed beds in National Health Service mental illness hospitals and units for 1985 and 1986, the latest years for which comparable information is available. The Health Service in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

We do not collect centrally the other information requested.

Available staffed beds in mental illness hospitals and units, at 31 December

Regional health authority	*Number of available staffed beds* 1985	1986	*Overall change*
Northern	5,606	5,375	−231
Yorkshire	6,070	5,660	−410
Trent	6,679	6,520	−159
East Anglian	2,756	2,655	−101
North West Thames	6,433	5,968	−465
North East Thames	5,887	5,771	−116
South East Thames	5,774	5,417	−357
South West Thames	6,061	5,528	−533
Wessex	3,626	3,411	−215
Oxford	2,290	2,195	−95
South Western	4,454	4,226	−228
West Midlands	6,964	6,764	−200
Mersey	5,421	5,062	−359
North Western	6,359	6,199	−160
Special health authorities	457	464	+7
Total	74,837	71,215	−3,622

Handicapped People (Homes)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by county, all local authority registered homes for the mentally and physically handicapped.

Mrs. Currie: The numbers of local authority homes for younger physically handicapped people in each local authority are published in "Residential Accommodation for the Elderly and Younger Physically Handicapped People: All Residents in Local Authority, Voluntary and Private Homes". The number of local authority-registered homes for mentally handicapped people in each local authority is published in "Homes and Hostels for Mentally Ill and Mentally Handicapped People". The latest available information relates to 1986. The "Directory of Independent Hospitals and Health Services" lists local authority-registered homes by name. Copies of all these publications are available in the Library.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his best estimate for each health authority of the percentage of eligible women who have been screened for cervical cancer at the latest convenient date.

Mrs. Currie: This information is not currently available as statistics to date have concentrated on the number of smear tests performed rather than on the number of women screened. It will however become available during 1989 when we receive health authorities' returns from Körner form KC 53 ("Adult screening programmes—cervical cytology").

Mental Illness

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has budgeted to be spent in 1987-88 and 1988-89 on continuing mental illness projects.

Mrs. Currie: Following proposals by all regional health authorities we announced allocations for mental illness development projects in February 1986 of £2 million in 1987-88 and £2·285 million in 1988-89. An innovative community-based family therapy service in Tower Hamlets health authority has also received direct funding of £33,000 in 1987-88 and £34,000 in 1988-89.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the voluntary organisations in the mental illness field which receive departmental grant aid, together with the amounts.

Mrs. Currie: The latest information is as follows:

1988-89 Amount

Organisation	*£000s per annum*
MIND (National Association for Mental Health)	415
Alzheimer's Disease Society	130
Samaritans[1]	125
CRUSE (Bereavement Care)	114
Richmond Fellowship	97
National Schizophrenia Fellowship	91
Good Practices in Mental Health	80
Mental After Care Association	50
Mental Health Film Council	35
Anorexic Family Aid	29
Mental Health Foundation	27
British Institute of Industrial Therapy	25
Rape Counselling and Research Project	25
North West Fellowship	20
Northern Schizophrenia Fellowship[1]	20
Widows' Advisory Trust	18
Phobic Action	5
Phobics Society	5
Nafsiyat (Inter-Cultural Therapy Centre)	5
Women's Therapy Centre	5

Grants are generally agreed for a three-year period and are renewable. Bodies marked with a "[1]" have grants which fall to be renewed from 1988-89, but new rates have not yet been agreed.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what joint finance monies and project funding are being provided to district health authorities and local authority social services by his Department in the current year to improve the range and quality of day care and other facilities for the mentally ill.

Mrs. Currie: We have allocated £112·8 million to joint finance in 1988-89 to support the development of jointly planned services by health and local authorities for all types of patient. Decisions about the allocation of funding are made at local level on the recommendations of each joint consultative committee. We do not yet have centrally information on expenditure on services for mentally ill people for the current financial year.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent on directly commissioned mental illness research in 1987-88; how much has been budgeted for 1988-89; and what each figure represents as a proportion of expenditure on the Health Service research programme.

Mrs. Currie: In 1987-88 the Department spent £1,267,000 on directly commissioned research relevant to mental illness. In 1988-89 a total of £1,307,900 has been made available for such research. Expressed as a percentage of the Department's total health, personal social services and social security research budget, the figures are 9·3 per cent. and 8·2 per cent., respectively.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what funds have been specifically earmarked for the care of the mentally ill following the closure of mental hospitals in each health region in the last year; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list by regional health authority the amounts provided for *(a)* the last, *(b)* the current and *(c)* the next year for bridging funds for local care of patients discharged or excluded from mental hospitals; and how much in each case is provided for long-term patients still to be discharged from hospitals and how much for those already discharged from hospital.

Mrs. Currie: In the main the Department does not identify funds for specific purposes such as the provision of mental illness services within its overall allocations to regions or in its planned provision for local authority social services expenditure. The allocation of resources to district health authorities is a matter for regions, and it is for regions and districts to determine, within a national framework of health care priorities, and in the light of local needs and circumstances, how all their resources can best be used. So far as local authorities are concerned, it is for them to determine the level and balance of their expenditure on the provision of social services.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential places in the community will be provided in each health region in *(a)* the current and *(b)* the next year for those discharged from mental hospitals.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is not available. The number of places in homes and hostels for the mentally ill in each local authority in England is published in "Homes and Hostels for Mentally Ill and Mentally Handicapped People"; a copy of which is in the library.

Mentally Disordered Offenders

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has received from each regional health authority in England and Wales to his advice to them following the report by the director of prison medical services on mentally disordered offenders in England and Wales to develop a comprehensive network of provision to meet mental heath care needs in their regions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Copies of the report were sent to regional health authorities in December 1987. No specific response was requested. We will be monitoring progress through the established review procedures.

Adelphi House

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when agreements to rent office space to accommodate his senior staff at the Adelphi building in the Strand were approved and signed by him; what rental per square foot was agreed; and what option he has secured to rent further office space at Adelphi house.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Property Services Agency negotiated the acquisition of the Adelphi on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Security on a strictly commercial and therefore in confidence basis. The lease was signed by the Property Services Agency on 26 August 1988, after negotiations with the landlord over a number of months. There is an option to acquire additional space if required on the seventh floor of the building.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated total cost of equipping and furnishing office space rented by his Department at Adelphi house; what information he has as to who is the freeholder of Adelphi house; from whom his Department has leased office space; who advised his Department in the negotiations which led to a lease agreement being signed to rent space at Adelphi house; and what commissions have been paid in connection with this lease being agreed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The requirements of staff due to move to the Adelphi building are being considered and I am not able to provide this costing information at present. The office space was leased from the then owner of Adelphi, Manufacturers Hanover. The building has since been sold on to Gefica Industries. Negotiations were conducted by the Property Services Agency on our behalf without specific charge to my Department.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were located at his Department's Elephant and Castle offices in each of the last five years; how many of these staff have been transferred to the Richmond building, to date; how many are to be transferred; how many are to be located at Adelphi house; when refurbishment of the Elephant and Castle building is to start; and what is the total estimated cost of this work.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In each of the five years up to the end of 1987, about 2,100 staff were based at the Elephant and Castle. Of those, 340 have now moved to Richmond house, together with 140 from other headquarters buildings in London. A further 580 staff are expected to move from Alexander Fleming house to the Adelphi.

Final decisions about the refurbishment of Alexander Fleming house have yet to be taken by the owner who is also responsible for the costs. According to present plans, the work is likely to start in June 1989.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the availability of office space was a factor in the decision to split the Department of Health and Social Security into two departments; and if he will review the cost effectiveness of the Department of Health renting office space in the Adelphi building.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The availability of office space was not a factor in the decision to split the Department of Health and Social Security into two Departments. The planned occupation of key ministerial support staff in the Adelphi is an important improvement in my Department's efficient use of London HQ accommodation. At the moment we have some 4,700 staff in 12 buildings scattered across London. Our intention is that about 1,000 staff should be in or near to Whitehall (480 already in Richmond house and 580 to go to the Adelphi); at least 1,000 should be relocated out of London, with the remainder at the Elephant and Castle. This will allow my Deparment to vacate other central London buildings.

This will increase efficiency by concentrating staff in a few locations and improve cost effectiveness by having the minimum number of staff in a high rental area (in or near Whitehall) and the maximum number in the relatively cheap rental area at the Elephant and Castle or relocated away from London.

Helicopters

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has as to what extent helicopters and other air transport are used to facilitate the transport of seriously ill and injured patients and as to what extent financial considerations discourage such use.

Mrs. Currie: In the United Kingdom, RAF helicopters transport has been used occasionally by the NHS for many years, both in emergency rescue missions which are free and in secondary transport services which must be paid for. In Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly a helicopter has been operating in support of the ambulance services for the past year and in June the *Daily Express* announced that, with Government support, it will fund a helicopter based at the London Hospital to transport accident victims to hospital. Several other health authorities are known to be actively considering the feasibility of using helicopters in this way.

Cook/Chill Catering

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether Mr. Arthur Pinegar, principal microbiologist in the public health laboratory in Leeds, is also operating a private laboratory undertaking the evaluation and monitoring of cook/chill catering.

Mrs. Currie: Mr. Pinegar has advised the public health laboratory service board that the laboratory with which he is connected in a private capacity is not currently involved in work on cook/chill catering.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why his Department's new guidelines on cook/chill catering, which were to have been published in August, are not yet ready for publication.

Mrs. Currie: Because we need more time. They will be published when they are ready.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the microbiological studies of food produced by the cook/chill process being undertaken by the public health laboratory service have included the assessment of listeria.

Mrs. Currie: Yes. Preliminary work on the growth and survival of listeria monocytogenes in foods prepared in cook/chill catering have been undertaken by the public health laboratory service (PHLS). Further studies are in progress in the PHLS which include examination of meals produced in NHS hospital cook/chill catering systems for the presence of this organism. Further work is planned.

Eggs

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to ensure the public do not contract poisioning through the consumption of eggs.

Mrs. Currie: The Department issued public advice on 26 August 1988 not to consume raw eggs or uncooked meals made from them. In view of later epidemiological evidence suggesting some risk of food poisoning from eating lightly cooked eggs, we issued further advice to the public on 21 November 1988. Chief environmental health officers of local authorities have been advised by the Department on 2 September. The Government's chief medical officer reinforced this advice on radio and television in the days following that. This must be seen in the context of a consumption of 30 million eggs a day in the United Kingdom. Therefore the risk to any individual from eating an individual egg is very small.

It is clearly always safest to cook any food thoroughly and eggs are no exception to this general rule.

Playgroups

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number and proportion of under-fives in playgroups for each year since 1958.

Mrs. Currie: Information is not available in exactly the form requested.

The number of places in playgroups, and the number per thousand population aged under five, are given in the table for the years 1982-87. We do not have comparable information for earlier years.

Places in playgroups England 1982-87
Numbers and rates

As at 31 March	*Places in playgroups (Thousands)*	*Rates per 1,000 population aged under five*
1982	374·3	132·1
1983	387·8	134·2
1984	393·8	133·8
1985	409·4	138·6
1986	412·4	138·7
1987	414·1	137·8

Nurses (Grading)

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing and midwifery staff from each of the old grades have been assimilated to each of the new grades in the clinical grading structure in England.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested is given in the table:

The new clinical grading structure for nursing, midwifery and health visitor staff.
Percentage of old clinical grades assimilated to each of the new clinical grades on the basis of duties and responsibilities on 1st April 1988: England

		Percentages transferred to each new clinical grade								
Previous grade	[1]*Staff in post*	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	[2]*G*	*H*	*I*
Nursing Auxiliary	90,819·73	86·3	13·5	0·3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Staff Nursery Nurse	2,357·19	2·3	89·5	7·9	0·3	—	—	—	—	—
Enrolled Nurse[1]	64,440·72	—	—	43·7	47·6	8·7	0·1	—	—	—
Enrolled District Nurse[1]	3,476·26	—	—	4·5	92·2	3·1	0·2	—	—	—
Senior Enrolled Nurse[1]	3,774·55	—	—	2·1	49·8	46·6	1·3	0·2	—	—
Staff Nurse[1]	75,609·73	—	—	—	25·2	65·5	9·1	0·2	—	—
Staff Midwife[1]	9,012·88	—	—	—	10·4	77·1	12·4	0·1	—	—
Deputy Sister[1]	4,179·59	—	—	—	0·2	18·0	79·3	2·5	0·1	—
Nursing Sister II[1]	40,906·51	—	—	—	—	—	39·3	57·9	2·7	0·1
Midwifery Sister II[1]	9,912·59	—	—	—	—	—	24·6	74·3	1·1	—
District Nurse (Sister II)[1]	9,881·94	—	—	—	—	—	1·2	94·8	3·9	0·1
Nursing Sister I	1,414·58	—	—	—	—	—	2·6	47·0	45·4	5·0
Midwifery Sister I	139·75	—	—	—	—	—	2·1	51·3	44·4	2·1
Health Visitor	9,275·43	—	—	—	—	—	0·2	96·8	2·8	0·2
Senior Nurse 8	3,352·81	—	—	—	—	—	0·3	13·6	56·2	29·9
Senior Nurse 8 (Midwife)	404·87	—	—	—	—	—	0·7	9·6	45·4	44·2
Senior Nurse 7	3,526·47	—	—	—	—	—	0·1	1·0	18·3	80·6
Senior Nurse 7 (Midwife)	360·93	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	18·8	81·2
Clinical Teacher	1,114·24	—	—	—	—	—	—	2·1	94·9	3·0
Fieldwork Teacher	1,369·85	—	—	—	—	—	0·1	1·7	97·3	0·9
Practical Work Teacher	1,498·11	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·3	97·6	1·1
Tutor	1,344·17	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3·7	96·3
Tutor Midwife	428·11	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2·1	97·9
Post basic students										
Enrolled	2,034·01	—	—	90·7	8·7	0·6	—	—	—	—
Staff Nurse	7,900·26	—	—	0·9	89·3	8·5	0·7	0·6	—	—
Deputy Sister	74·90	—	—	—	9·3	39·9	42·7	8·0	—	—
Sister II	368·67	—	—	—	3·3	1·4	72·6	21·3	1·2	0·3
Others	1,031·30	1·4	2·4	0·7	24·3	7·8	1·8	39·9	3·1	18·7
Totals	350,010·16	22·4	4·1	8·8	18·1	18·7	[illegible]·7	14·7	2·7	1·8

[1] Whole time equivalents

[2] Excludes Post Basic Students

Notes: 1. Excludes some 3,500 additional '6' posts which health authorities have indicated they intend to create in future on existing two-sister wards.

2. The percentages may not always sum to 100 due to rounding.

Committee on Safety of Medicines

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the size of the budgets available to the Committee on Safety of Medicines in each of the years 1978 to 1987 inclusive.

Mr. Mellor: The Committee on Safety of Medicines is supported by the Department through expenditure on staff, accommodation, office services, computing and other facilities as required: the costs cannot be separately identified. A separate budget covers expenditure on behalf of the committee on various activities including members' fees and expenses, mailing of 'Dear Doctor' letters and 'Current Problems' to doctors, dentists and pharmacists, and actions to promote adverse reaction reporting. The budgets for this area of expenditure from the 1980-81 financial year are set out in the table. Figures from earlier years cannot be identified separately without disproportionate expense.

	£
1980-81	110,000
1981-82	136,000
1982-83	177,000
1983-84	224,000
1984-85	315,000
1985-86	428,000
1986-87	445,000
1987-88	460,000

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases involving adverse reactions to medicines have been referred to the Committee on Safety of Medicines in each of the years 1978 to 1987 inclusive; and what percentage of these cases have arisen through the yellow card system in each of these years.

Mr. Mellor: Suspected adverse reactions to medicines are reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines by doctors, dentists, coroners and pharmaceutical companies, for the most part on yellow cards provided by the committee (or standard forms for pharmaceutical companies) but sometimes in correspondence. Medical journals are also scanned for adverse reaction reports. The total number of reports received in each year since 1978 is given in the table: computer records do not distinguish the precise source of each report. The CSM also makes use of additional information from the World Health Organisation database of adverse reaction reports contributed by 26 countries, reports from pharmaceutical companies of serious reactions occurring overseas and published literature about adverse reactions.

Reports of suspected adverse reactions received by the CSM

	Number
1978	11,873
1979	10,840
1980	10,179
1981	13,032
1982	10,922
1983	12,689

	Number
1984	12,163
1985	12,652
1986	15,527
1987	16,431

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many persons are employed full-time by the Committee on Safety of Medicines; and if he will indicate the nature of their appointment in each case.

Mr. Mellor: The Committee on Safety of Medicines does not employ any staff directly. It is supported by medical, scientific, pharmaceutical, legal and administrative staff employed by the Department of Health, many of whom also work on other duties for the licensing authority or the Department.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines indicating *(a)* their professional background, *(b)* whether their appointments are full-time or part-time and *(c)* their remuneration in each case.

Mr. Mellor: The present membership of the Committee on Safety of Medicines is given in the table, with the members' professional qualifications and current employment. Appointment to the committee is on the basis of fees for attendance at meetings, which are held 11 times a year for one or two days. The present fee for attendance is £61 (£76 for the chairman), with an additional £15 preparation fee (£18 for the chairman).

Members of the Committee on Safety of Medicines

Professor A. W. Asscher (Chairman) BSc MD FRCP—Dean St. Georges Hospital Medical School, London
Professor S. S. Bleehan BA MB BChir FRCP—Professor of Dermatology, Sheffield University and Consultant Dermatologist, Royal Hallamshire Hospital
Profesor T. G. Booth OBE B Pharm PhD FR Pharm MCPP—Professor of Pharmacy Practice, University of Bradford
Professor A. M. Breckenridge MD MSc FRCP—Professor of Clinical Pharmacology University of Liverpool
Professor J. G. Collee MD FRCP FRCPath—Professor of Bacteriology University of Edinburgh
Professor P H Elworthy B Pharm PhD DSc MSc CChem MRSC FPS MCPP—Emeritus Professor of Pharmacy, University of Manchester and Visiting Professor of Pharmaceutica, Kings College and the School of Pharmacy, Univeristy of London
Professor A. T. Florence DSC PhD FRSE FRSC FR Pharms—Professor of Pharmacy University of Strathclyde, Dean of the School of Pharmacy University of London (From 1 January 1989)
Professor H S Jacobs BA MD FRCP—Professor of Reproductive Endocrinology Middlesex Hospital Medical School London
Dr. W. A. Jerrett MD BCh FRCGP—General Practitioner Glamorgan
Professor M. J. S. Langman BSc MD FRCP—Professor of Medicine University of Nottingham
Professor D. H. Lawson MD MB ChB FRCP (Ed) FRCP (Glasgow)—Consultant Physician in Clinical Pharmacology, Glasgow and Visiting Professor, University of Strathclyde
Mr. F. E. Loeffler FRCS FRCOG—Consultant Gynaecologist and Obstetrician at St. Mary's and Queen Charlotte and Chelsea Hospital
Professor J. O'D McGee MD PhD FRCPath MA(Oxon)—Professor and Head, Nuffield Department of Pathology and Bacteriology, Oxford
Professor A. E. M. McLean BM PhD FRCPath—Professor of Toxicology University College Hospital
Dr. Elizabeth Mayne MD FRCP(G) FRCPath—Consultant Haematologist Department of Haematology University of Belfast
Professor S. R. Meadow MA FRCP DCh—Professor of Paediatrics and Child Health Leeds University
Dr. S. A. Montgomery MD BSc MB BS FRCPsych Eng—Reader in Psychiatry St. Mary's Medical School London
Professor G. Nuki MB BS FRCP (Ed) FRCP(Lond) MRCS—Professor of Rheumatology University of Edinburgh
Dr. B. L. Pentecost MD FRCP—Consultant Physician Birmingham
Professor M. D. Rawlins MD DRCP BSc—Professor of Clinical Pharmacology University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Professor M. P. Vessey MA MD FRCP FRCGP FFCM—Professor of Social and Community Medicine University of Oxford

Day Nurseries

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number and proportion of under-fives in local authority day nurseries for each year since 1958.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is given in the table for the years 1973 to 1987. We do not have readily available comparable information for earlier years.

Children on registers of local authority provided day nurseries England 1973 to 1987

As at 31 March	*Number on register of local authority day nurseries (thousands)*	*Rates per 1,000 population aged under five*
1973	25·0	6·9
1974	25·7	7·3
1975	26·1	7·7
1976	27·8	8·6
1977	28·9	9·5
1978	28·9	10·0
1979	28·9	10·4
1980	29·9	10·8
1981	31·1	11·2
1982	31·7	11·2
1983	32·3	11·2
1984	33·8	11·5
1985	32·9	11·1
1986	34·9	11·7
1987	34·7	11·6

Child-minders

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number and proportion of under-fives in the care of local authority registered child-minders for each year since 1958.

Mrs. Currie: We do not hold information in exactly the form requested.

The number of places with registered childminders, and the number per thousand population aged under five, are given in the table for the years 1973 to 1977 and 1982 to 1987. We do not have readily available comparable information for earlier years.

Places with registered childminders, England, 1973-87

England *Numbers and rates*

As at 31 March	*Places with registered childminders (Thousands)*	*Rates per 1,000 population aged under five*
1973	90·2	24·8
1974	85·2	24·1
1975	85·6	25·4
1976	83·4	25·8

As at 31 March	*Places with registered childminders (Thousands)*	*Rates per 1,000 population aged under five*
1977	86·7	28·5
1978	[1]—	[1]—
1979	[1]—	[1]—
1980	[1]—	[1]—
1981	[1]—	[1]—
1982	98·4	34·7
1983	106·4	36·8
1984	116·3	39·5
1985	126·8	42·9
1986	137·7	46·3
1987	150·6	50·1

[1] No reliable data available.

NHS Employees

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are general medical practitioners currently practising in the National Health Service;

(2) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women currently work as hospital doctors in the National Health Service;

(3) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are currently employed as consultants in the National Health Service.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* The information is set out in the table.

Doctors in NHS hospitals and general practice in England

Males and females *Numbers*

	Males	*Females*
Hospital doctors (all staff)[1]	32,835	11,078
Medical consultants[1]	12,021	1,941
General medical practitioners[2]	19,819	5,263

[1] Includes permanent paid and honorary staff as at 30 September 1987.

[2] Includes restricted and unrestricted principals as at 1 October 1987.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each region and the special health authorities the total number of available beds for each specialty for each year since 1979; and if he will give the national totals.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* The information requested for the years 1979 to 1986 is contained in the booklets "Forms SH3, EDP4, 5 and 6—Regional and National Summaries", copies of which have been placed in the Library. From 1 April 1987, data on available beds is no longer being collected by specialty, but by ward classification instead.

Assessment Teams

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the designated training centres are currently running courses for staff wishing to work in specialist assessment teams; and if he will break that down into *(a)* the number of people on each course, *(b)* the number of radiologists being trained, *(c)* the number of radiographers being trained and *(d)* the duration of each course and its date of completion.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* We do not hold the information in the precise form requested. In 1987 the Guildford and Nottingham breast screening centres started holding regular training courses for radiologists and radiographers. The Camberwell (King's College hospital) and Manchester centres started general, introductory training this year and plan to start regular courses for radiologists and radiographers early next year. Core training is based on guidance from the Royal College of Radiologists and the College of Radiographers, but the duration of courses may vary to reflect the previous experience and requirements of the participants. Information is not held centrally on the duration of courses and number of participants. The training centres have also held workshops and seminars for other health professionals including surgeons, pathologists and nurses. The Royal Marsden hospital has participated in the national training initiative by running a seminar for specialist assessment teams and is also providing six-week courses for nurses. In addition, £110,000 is being allocated to regional health authorities in the current financial year to provide in-service training.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those private health screening facilities which he is aware of, broken down into *(a)* mobile units and *(b)* static units.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* We do not collect this information centrally. However "Laing's Review of Private Healthcare 1987", a copy of which is in the Library, includes details of screening clinics.

Contractual Arrangements

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to be able to release the information on contractual arrangements with private hospitals or clinics, referred to in his answer of 22 July, *Official Report*, column 899.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* We are analysing the information on district health authorities contractual arrangements with private hospitals and clinics and it will be published as soon as possible. Further investigation is necessary before details relating to types of treatment can be provided.

Nurseries

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the child population under the age of three years is cared for in local authority day nurseries, for each local authority in England and Wales.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* We do not hold information in exactly the form requested. However, figures for numbers of children aged under five on registers of local authorities in England are published on an annual basis in "Children's Day Care Facilities at 31 March", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

In 1987 there were 34,700 children on registers of local authority day nurseries in England, that is 1·2 per cent. of the population aged under five. Figures for Welsh authorities are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to publish hospital waiting list figures within three months of the date of collection; and if he will make it his policy to publish the national, regional and district totals simultaneously.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* The publication of any summarised information is dependent on the speed with which health authorities submit accurate figures. Waiting list figures for March and September each year are published as soon as all necessary validation has been carried out. National and regional summaries are published in statistical bulletins, and the more detailed district figures are produced as soon as possible thereafter. These procedures will continue to be followed.

TRANSPORT

London Assessment Studies

7. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many London boroughs, or their associations, have supported the proposals in the stage 2a reports of the London assessment studies.

Mr. Channon: The reports contain no firm proposals. They put forward the consultants' preliminary ideas for further development and assessment. They are still being discussed with representatives of the boroughs and their associations.

59. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cost to date of the London assessment studies; and what is their expected final cost.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The total cost of stage 1 of the studies was about £3 million. It is estimated that stage 2, which began last December, will cost £4 million to complete.

In comparison, personal injury accidents on roads in the east London assessment study area alone cost in the region of £50 million each year.

65. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contribution he expects the west London assessment study to play in deciding the future transport network in west London.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The west London assessment study was set up to address the serious transport problems along the western end of the South Circular road and the Earls Court one-way system. The consultants' report is due next summer. It is too early to say how the transport network of west London will be developed in the light of the study.

Road Building

12. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much the Government will spend on new road building over the next three years.

Mr. Channon: Approximately £3 billion.

Road Traffic Speed (London)

19. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the average speed of road traffic in inner London *(a)* during the morning and evening rush hours and *(b)* between the morning and evening rush hours.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Estimates for 1983-84 are 12·6 mph in the morning peak 14·0 mph in the interpeak period, and 12·2 mph in the evening peak period.

Rail Electrification

20. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has recently discussed with the British Railways Board the further electrification of the St. Pancras to Sheffield line.

Mr. Portillo: No but it would be for British Rail to propose such a scheme if it thought it justified.

23. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans to electrify the east coast railway line north of Edinburgh.

Mr. Portillo: It is for the British Railways Board, not the Government, to plan investment in the railways. I understand that it does not propose electrifying the line north of Edinburgh.

38. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of British Rail lines are electrified; and what are the equivalent figures for other European Economic Community countries.

Mr. Portillo: At present, 26 per cent. of British Rail's total route miles are electrified. This will increase to around 30 per cent. by the end of the decade.

	Per cent.
Belgium	56
Denmark	6
France	33
Germany	42
Greece	nil
Ireland	1
Italy	55
Luxembourg	60
Netherlands	65
Portugal	13
Spain	49

Ports (Congestion)

21. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to ease congestion at the ports.

Mr. Paul Channon: I am not aware that our ports in general are congested. If there is any particular problem, it is for the port authority concerned to resolve.

Roads (Maintenance)

22. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to review the maintenance of unclassified roads by district councils under the terms of the Highways Acts.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: These arrangements have been reviewed by the Audit Commission. We are following up its recommendations for improvements with the local authority associations.

Channel Tunnel

24. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received regarding regional access to the Channel tunnel by road and rail.

Mr. Portillo: I have had a number of representations but those regarding rail services are best directed to BR which has established working groups in each region of the United Kingdom.

28. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss progress made to date to link the north-east of England with the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Portillo: I shall be discussing with the chairman British Rail's plans for Channel tunnel services when BR has completed the consultations required by the Channel Tunnel Act.

45. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he intends to accelerate rail and road improvement programmes for east-west access to the Channel tunnel to meet increased traffic in 1992 and thereafter.

Mr. Portillo: Rail access is the responsibility of British Rail. It is required by section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act to publish a plan by the end of 1989 setting out its proposals for international passenger and freight services. BR is currently consulting interested parties in all regions of the United Kingdom, including the south-east. The Department is pressing ahead with a number of motorway and trunk road schemes which take account of the requirements of traffic to and from the Channel tunnel.

48. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has held with local authorities in the north-west of England regarding the impact of the Channel tunnel on the north-west's transport infrastructure.

Mr. Portillo: My predecessor addressed the "Transport 2000" conference in Manchester in February at which most of the region's country and district councils were represented.

The Department is involved in meetings between British Rail and regional interests, including local authorities, as part of British Rail's obligation to prepare by the end of 1989 a plan for passenger and freight services to the regions.

50. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what impact he expects the proposed routes for the Channel tunnel railway links to have on the residents and the environment of Dulwich; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: It is too soon to say. I understand that some of the proposed route options would affect parts of Dulwich. British Rail is at present consulting local authorities and other interested parties about its proposals.

56. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will hold a public inquiry into the location of a second rail terminal for Channel tunnel services in London.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail will need to seek statutory authorisation for the works associated with a second London terminal. The normal procedure for authorisation of new railway works is by means of a private Bill, which allows objectors to state their case to both Houses of Parliament.

61. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has received for direct rail links between Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff, Exeter and the Channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail is required by section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act to publish a plan by the end of 1989 setting out its proposals for passenger and freight services via the tunnel and any infrastructure developments they consider necessary to support those services. British Rail is currently consulting interested parties in all regions of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will publish all terms of the agreement made between British Rail and SNCF in connection with Channel tunnel traffic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo The Government were not party to the agreement between BR and SNCF and have no power to direct that it should be published. I understand that both the parties regard the details of the agreement as commercially confidential.

Speed Limits (Motorways)

25. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from the Institute of Advanced Motorists and others to review the speed limit on British motorways.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have received no recent formal representations from the Institute of Advanced Motorists or others to review motorway speed limits. We keep in close touch with the Institute of Advanced Motorists and value its contributions to road safety.

The 70 mph national speed limit strikes the right balance between the need for safety and movement.

Road Accident Statistics

26. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people were killed or injured on United Kingdom roads in 1987 and in 1986.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The total number of casualties in the United Kingdom in 1986 was 331,000 of whom 5,600 were killed. In 1987, the corresponding figures were 321,000 casualties in total, of whom 5,300 were killed. The total number of casualties was down 3 per cent. on the previous year and the fatalities were down by 5 per cent.

A fuller breakdown of the Northern Irish component of these figures is given in the Royal Ulster Constabulary's publication entitled "Road Traffic Accident Statistics Annual Report".

The Great Britain component of these figures is broken down in more detail in "Road Accidents Great Britain". The 1986 figures have been published and are available in the Library: the 1987 figures will be published shortly.

The total number of casualties in Great Britain in 1987 was 311,500, of whom 5,100 were killed, and 64,300 were seriously injured. The corresponding figures for 1986 were 321,500 casualties, 5,400 of whom were killed and 68,800 were seriously injured. The total number of casualties in 1987 was 3 per cent. below the number in 1986; fatalities were down by nearly 5 per cent.

The Secretary of State has set a target of reducing casualties by one third by the year 2000.

British Rail Engineering Ltd.

27. **Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assurances will be required from any purchasers of British Rail Engineering Ltd. with regard to the pension and other rights of existing employees.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail intends that employees of BREL will transfer to new owners with their existing terms and conditions of service. They will be able to preserve their accrued pension benefits in the BR scheme, or to transfer those benefits to a scheme set up by the owners.

Sugar Beet (Carriage)

29. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of lorries carrying sugar beet are netted *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in north Yorkshire; and if he will make a statemet.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is not available. Drivers of lorries are required to secure loads properly.

Drinking and Driving

30. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in the campaign against drinking and driving.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Although the campaign is going well, there must be no let-up.

Last year there were 1,400 alcohol-related road deaths: a quarter of all road deaths. Twenty-three per cent. of drivers and riders killed in 1987 were over the legal limit compared with 33 per cent. in 1978.

Surveys suggest that for the first time there are fewer than one million drink/drive occasions a week. This is about half the estimate for 1987.

Recent major campaign successes include:

promotion of low and non-alcoholic beers by the brewers. These beers are now the fastest growing sector of the drinks industry.

the public endorsement of our campaigns by the Licensed Victuallers Association and the not-for-profit clubs.

the active participation of major football clubs in getting the message across to fans.

the media now treat drinking and driving as a major news topic, and one worthy of serious current affairs coverage.

We shall be launching this year's Christmas campaign on 5 December.

The problem exists all the year round. It needs constant publicity.

Heavy Lorries

31. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new maximum weight heavy goods vehicles have been registered since 1982.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The number of new 38 tonne goods vehicles registered between May 1983, when this permitted maximum limit was introduced, and the end of September 1988, was 38,800. Between January 1982 and April 1983, 13,200 new vehicles were registered at the previous 32½ tonne limit.

Railways and Roads

32. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by what percentage spending on national railways and roads has increased in the last five years.

Mr. Portillo: British Railways board's total infrastructure investment and maintenance rose by 53 per cent. between 1982 and 1986-87. Total expenditure on roads in Great Britain rose 24·2 per cent. between 1982-83 and 1986-87. The figures are not directly comparable for a number of reasons.

M1 (Congestion)

33. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he intends in the short term to reduce congestion on the southern end of the M1 other than through the construction of the M40.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have no plans for works which would be completed in advance of the M40.

A number of schemes for the M1 and alternative roads are planned for completion in the early 1990s.

Traffic Congestion (South-East)

34. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on how his Department proposes to relieve traffic congestion in the south-east.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: By carrying out the road improvements detailed in the White Paper "Policy for Roads in England: 1987" as quickly as possible, by supporting local highway authorities with transport supplementary grant, through traffic management measures, and by approving appropriate investment proposals by British Rail and London Regional Transport.

Bus Services (Deregulation)

35. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will introduce legislation to deregulate bus services in Greater London.

Mr. Portillo: It remains our intention to extend bus deregulation to London. The Transport Act 1985 provides for the abolition of London bus service licensing; we are considering whether any further measures might be necessary.

Bypasses

36. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many bypasses will be started in 1989.

Mr. Bottomley: Our current intention is to start construction of some 20 bypasses in 1989.

Motorways and Trunk Roads (West Midlands)

37. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what level of capital expenditure for

motorways and trunk roads within the west midlands is allocated for the current financial year and for the next year; and what was the figure for 1979.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Exact comparisons with earlier years cannot be made because of recent changes in the Department's regional structure. Planned expenditure for 1988-89 of some £145 million in the west midlands region compares favourably with a best estimate for 1979-80 of £25 million. In real terms this represents more than a three-fold increase. Allocations for next year have still to be determined.

London Underground

39. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has met the chairman of London Underground Ltd. to discuss problems of capacity on the network.

44. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish the findings of the central London rail study.

63. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the Chairman of London Underground to discuss overcrowding in stations.

Mr. Portillo: The progress of the central London rail study was discussed at a meeting of the London passenger transport group on 21 November at which the Chairman of London Underground was present.

We hope to announce the main findings around the turn of the year.

71. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on what further steps are being taken to tighten safety regulations on the London Underground.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are pursuing with London Regional Transport its progress in adopting recommendations in the Fennell report.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will shortly be bringing forward regulations under section 12 of the Fire Precautions Act 1971, to require specific fire safety measures at underground stations; these regulations will be enforceable by fire authorities. The chief inspecting officer of railways is organising a special investigation of London Underground, with support from the Health and Safety Executive and the London fire brigade; and extra staff are being recruited for the railway inspectorate, for enforcement of safety legislation.

British Rail

46. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the chairman of British Rail; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met the chairman of BR on 23 November when they discussed a variety of railway matters.

53. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will next meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss rail services.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will next meet the chairman of BR on 15 December to discuss a variety of rail matters.

67. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much capital investment in British Rail rose between 1988 and 1978.

Mr. Portillo: In 1978 BR's railway investment was £194 million, equivalent to £421 million in 1988-89 prices. Budgeted investment for 1988-89 is £560 million—one third more in real terms. Figures of investment since 1970 were published on 4 November in the *Official Report* at column *800*, in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King).

42. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much British Rail plans to increase its investment in 1989 over 1988.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail's planned corporate investment expenditure for 1988-89 and 1989-90 is as follows:

	Cash (£ million)	*1988-89 Prices (£ million)*
1988-89	624	624
1989-90	846	806

This represents an increase in real terms of almost 30 per cent.

Deer

41. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures the Government are taking to prevent deer from straying on to roads.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Anti-deer fencing is erected on motorways where deer are known to be present and where they could constitute a hazard to motorists. Other measures include special roadside reflectors. Advice is taken from wildlife experts when roads are planned. Warning signs for motorists to read are erected where deer are a known hazard.

London Regional Transport

43. **Mr. Prescott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will next meet the acting chairman of London Regional Transport to discuss the implementation of the recommendations of the Fennel report.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend met Sir Neil Shields on 16 November when the Fennel report was discussed among other matters. I shall be meeting board members of London Regional Transport and London Underground on 5 December to discuss implementation of the report.

Vehicle Emissions

47. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he intends to take to encourage a reduction in carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbon emissions from vehicles in both private and public ownership.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On 5 August, in press notice No. 418 we announced that we would be consulting in the next few months on draft regulations to bring into effect in Britain the new tighter limits on these emissions from cars and commercial vehicles agreed by the European Community in directives 88/76 EEC and 88/77/EEC. These new limits will apply to new vehicles. Our proposed timetable is as follows:

Vehicle type	*New type approvals*	*All new registrations*
Large cars (over 2,000 cc)	1 October 1991	1 October 1992
Medium cars (1,400-2,000 cc)	1 October 1991	1 October 1993
Small cars (under 1,400 cc) (stage 1)	1 October 1990	1 October 1991
Vans (under 2 tonnes gvw) etc	1 October 1990	1 October 1991
Vans (over 2 tonnes gvw) etc	1 October 1992	1 October 1993

Specific dates for imposing limits on gaseous emissions from all diesel-engined vehicles—mainly lorries, buses and coaches—are currently under discussion with the motor industry.

Road and Vehicle Safety

49. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to launch a publicity campaign to make drivers more aware of road and vehicle safety.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Yes. The next phase of the increasingly effective campaigns against drinking and driving will be launched on 5 December. Surveys show that these campaigns have led to fewer than 1 million drink/drive occasions a week.

With the support of road safety officers and the police. We have also run campaigns on child pedestrians, child seat-restraints, motorway safety and winter weather conditions, this year. Further comparisons are planned on a variety of road safety topics.

Railway Inspectorate

51. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chief inspecting officer for railways to discuss the 1987 annual report of the railway inspectorate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State meets the chief inspecting officer of railways frequently and railway safety is discussed.

Civil Aviation

52. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the conclusions reached at the conference which he convened on civil aviation at Lancaster house on Monday 7 November.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The purpose of the conference (which was held in private) was to analyse the air traffic control congestion problems of the summer, and to discuss ways of improving matters for 1989 and beyond. The Civil Aviation Authority explained its strategy for the provision of air traffic control services in the short, medium and long term, and the conference heard of the initiatives which the United Kingdom and others have been taking to improve co-ordination between air traffic services in Europe. Ways of alleviating the effects of delays on passengers were outlined by representatives of the airlines, airports and tour operators. The conference produced a number of new ideas which are being followed up.

Wandsworth

54. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to meet hon. Members for the London borough of Wandsworth to discuss road development plans for the borough; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The west London assessment study consultants are considering a wide range of options, which include road improvements. I shall be glad to discuss the progress of the studies with the hon. Members concerned.

Sir Keith Bright and Dr. Tony Ridley

55. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is now in a position to announce the severance terms agreed with Sir Keith Bright and Dr. Tony Ridley.

Mr. Portillo: No.

Rail Travel

57. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures the Government take to encourage the use of rail rather than road.

Mr. Portillo: The Government believe that in general users should decide which mode of transport to use, taking account of relative convenience, quality and cost. They therefore seek to ensure that different means of transport can compete fairly on equal terms. Where there are special reasons for encouraging one type of transport rather than another—that is, to relieve road congestion—and it is cost-effective to do so, the Government pay grants.

The Government also recognise that in some circumstances transferring freight from road to rail can have substantial environmental benefits and make grants under section 8 of the Railways Act 1974 towards the capital cost of freight facilities.

The Government's policies on the financing of railways are set out in more detail in their response to the third report of the Transport Select Committee, session 1986-87.

M25/M1 (Traffic Congestion)

58. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further measures he is considering to ease traffic congestion on the M25 and M1 in the south-east; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The whole motorway and trunk road network is kept under review and schemes for improvement are brought forward for consideration wherever they can be justified.

Specific schemes already under construction are the widening of the M25 between junctions 11 and 13 and the new four-lane Dartford river crossing bridge. Schemes being prepared are the provision of crawler lanes in both directions on the M1 at junction 9 and improvements to junction 1 of the M1.

Completion of the extension of the M40 to Birmingham, will attract traffic away from the M1, as will improvements planned for the A5 in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

Consultants are currently undertaking a review of the whole of the M25. This will identify existing and potential problem areas on the M25 and adjacent areas of radial road and suggest solutions. The results of the review are expected in the new year. We have recently received and are considering the results of a more specific study of the problems of traffic congestion around junctions 15 and 16 of the M25.

Air Routes (Liberalisation)

60. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he is making on the liberalisation of European air routes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: As a result of liberalising measures adopted last December by the Council of Ministers, United Kingdom airlines have introduced a number of new services and lower fares on European routes. We are now preparing for the second stage of EC liberalisation, to be implemented by June 1990.

We have also been actively pressing for even more liberal bilateral agreements with other European states and have recently reached a liberal bilateral agreement with Ireland and have entered into new arrangements with Austria which remove barriers to market entry.

Motor Cycle Casualties

62. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the trend in motor cycle casualties.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is given in the table:

Motorcycle casualties and casualty rates: by severity: Great Britain: 1977 to 1987

Number/rate per 100 million vehicle kilometres

	1977	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Killed	1,182	1,163	1,160	1,163	1,131	1,090	963	967	796	762	723
Rate	25	25	24	20	17	16	15	15	14	14	14
Killed or seriously injured	21,504	21,502	21,277	22,697	22,329	22,687	20,317	20,009	18,172	16,466	13,896
Rate	452	453	433	384	334	328	322	318	321	305	272
All severities	71,689	69,733	67,155	70,838	69,129	71,920	64,494	63,821	56,591	52,280	45,801
Rate	1,507	1,470	1,366	1,197	1,034	1,041	1,023	1,014	999	968	896

Motorcycles include all two wheeled motor vehicles.

Speed Restrictions

64. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend the rules for imposing 30 mph speed restrictions within villages in rural areas.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Wrong limits may lead to a false sense of security and increased danger for residents.

We give guidance, in circulars (roads) 1/80 and 4/83, to highway authorities about the criteria for speed limits. That guidance is advisory. Highway authorities have discretion over speed limits on all local roads. For principal and trunk roads, our aim is to maintain a balance between safety and mobility. Introduction of 30 mph speed limits needs to be matched by enforcement and engineering measures to ensure compliance.

Road Accident Statistics

66. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the record of accidents involving death or serious injury on the A1 in Northumberland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Personal injury traffic accidents on A1 trunk road in Northumberland are all reported by the police to the northern regional office. These statistics are also recorded nationally.

Assessments on individual sections of the A1 are made wherever a problem area can be identified.

The current accident rate for all personal injury accidents on the A1 in Northumberland, based on reports for the last three years, is 0·22 per million vehicle kilometres. This is less than the regional and national rates for non-built-up trunk roads.

New Roads (Environmental Damage)

68. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to minimise the environmental damage of new roads.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We minimise the impact of new roads on the environment by careful design. We fit schemes into the landscape, plant trees and screen traffic. We take special measures to protect wildlife. The Department's publication "Transport and the Environment" gives examples of the measures that we employ.

Road Accidents (Cost)

69. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest available figure for the annual cost of road accidents to the National Health Service.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is estimated that the cost of road accidents to the National Health Service due to hospital treatment in 1987 was £146 million.

Fatalities have a low medical cost but an incalculable family cost.

Common Shipping Policy

70. **Sir David Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made in the Council of Ministers of the European Community in determining and then implementing a common shipping policy.

Mr. Portillo: In December 1986, under United Kingdom Presidency, four regulations were adopted which set the foundations for a common European shipping policy. The United Kingdom is continuing to press hard for progress towards liberalising the cabotage trades of six member states. We also await details of the

EC Commission's proposals for positive measures to tackle the decline of the European fleets and to improve their competitiveness in world shipping markets.

Road Traffic Speed (London)

72. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to speed up London traffic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are improving trunk roads to help orbital traffic and to replace bottlenecks. We are supporting similar borough schemes with grants. We have given traffic management guidance to the boroughs. We are using new technology to improve traffic signalling. We support autoguide. We are encouraging effective parking controls. We are promoting attractive public transport systems.

A31 (Stoney Cross)

73. **Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to announce his final decision regarding the Stoney Cross intersections of the A31 in Hampshire.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We hope to publish a revised compulsory purchase order shortly. Our final decision will depend upon whether it is opposed and whether a further inquiry is necessary.

Railways (Overcrowding)

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has received to relieve overcrowding on the railways.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received and approved several investment proposals to relieve overcrowding on Network SouthEast and London Underground. British Rail has also put on additional trains to meet increased demand on other parts of the rail system.

M40

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to announce his decision on the Waterstock to Wandlebury section of the M40.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are giving urgent consideration to the complex issues in the inspector's report. We hope to be able to make an announcement early next year.

Ports (Roads Financing)

Mr. Stern: To as the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any proposals to change the method of financing roads to or around ports.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. We will however consider seriously any well-based proposals for involvement of private funds in this or any other part of the road network.

Cars (Computerised Guidance System)

Mr John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when and where the first pilot scheme on a computerised guidance system for cars is expected to be in operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We hope shortly to invite private sector proposals for a London autoguide pilot scheme. The area of operation and timing of implementation will depend on the proposals submitted and on parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation.

Yachts (Light Dues)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the likely revenue if yachts are required to pay light dues.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made no such estimates. He has, however, invited the British Ports Federation to undertake a study of the feasibility of charging light dues on pleasure craft. It is too early to say what conclusions might emerge.

New Roads

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of new road have been built since 1979.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Over 850 miles of new and improved trunk road have been built since 1979.

M25 (Traffic Flow)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the need to improve traffic flow on the M25.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have received a number of representations about traffic problems on the M25. A review of the whole motorway is in hand which will identify the problems and suggest solutions. The results of the review are expected in the new year. The Freight Transport Association survey shows that 97 per cent. of operators valued the M25.

Southend—London

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what informaton he has received from transport undertakings and other bodies about the increase in the numbers of persons travelling from Southend to London and back daily over the past five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information is not available within the Department.

Traffic Congestion

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for alleviating traffic congestion; what are his investment priorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We seek to alleviate congestion through road improvements, investment in rail facilities and traffic management measures. Investment priorities for roads are set out in the White Paper "Policy for Roads in England 1987" and for public transport in British Rail's corporate plan 1988 and the London Regional Transport annual business plan 1987-88.

Settle-Carlisle Railway

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the Settle to Carlisle railway.

Mr. Portillo: Not yet. We are waiting for advice from the Transport Users' Consultative Committees and representations from the local authorities.

Severn Bridge

17. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects work to start on a second Severn bridge; and when he estimates it will be completed.

Mr. Channon: We are on course to provide the bridge by the mid-1990s, if traffic justifies that. The private sector will be given the opportunity to fund the bridge. Promoters will be asked to indicate possible completion dates and the toll levels associated with them.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many objections he has received to his proposal to increase tolls on the Severn bridge from *(a)* Gwent, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have received 86 objections from persons living in Gwent, 15 from other parts of Wales, 26 from England and four from national organisations.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why he chose Bristol as the location of the inquiry into the proposed increase of tolls on the Severn bridge in preference to a location in Wales.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Experience with previous inquiries has shown that the Bristol area is a convenient location.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many objections he received to his previous proposal to increase tolls on the Severn bridge from *(a)* Gwent, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England; and how many from each area gave (i) oral and (ii) written evidence to the previous inquiry.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Of the objections received to the previous proposals to increase tolls at the Severn bridge, 36 were from Gwent, seven from other areas in Wales, and 37 from England. A further seven were from national organisations.

The number of persons from each area who gave evidence to the 1984 inquiry was as follows:

	Gwent	*Other areas in Wales*	*England*	*National Organisation*
(i) Oral	10	7	6	10
(ii) Written	3	4	5	9

Six members of the Department of Transport also gave evidence.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the latest traffic counts for all transport modes crossing the Severn bridge and the percentage of the journeys that originate from: *(a)* Bristol, *(b)* west of England, *(c)* Gwent and *(d)* Wales.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The annual average daily flow of traffic over the Severn crossing for the 12 months ending 31 October 1988 was 46,912. Heavy goods vehicles accounted for about 17 per cent., light goods 7 per cent. and buses and coaches 1 per cent. The approximate percentage of westbound journeys originating in Bristol and Avon is 53 per cent. and from the rest of south-west England 10 per cent. The approximate percentage of eastbound journeys orginating in Gwent is 30 per cent. and from the rest of Wales 62 per cent.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 29 November 1988

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Chat-line Telephone Services

Ms. Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) if he proposes to introduce legislation to control the chat-line telephone services and the advertising of such services;

(2) whether he proposes to take action to ban the advertising of chat-line telephone services in magazines and newspapers targeting young people.

Mr. Atkins: The Director General of Telecommunications has already proposed some controls on these services, and these proposals are being considered by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which will report its conclusions shortly. The advertising of chat-line services is subject to the British code of advertising practice administered by the Advertising Standards Authority. The independent committee for the supervision of standards of telephone information services also takes a particular interest in advertisements of such services and considers complaints.

Patent Office

Mr. Cran: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress is being made in the planned relocation of the Patent Office to Newport, south Wales; how many civil servants will be involved in the transfer; and when he expects the relocation to be complete.

Mr. Forth: Plans for the relocation of the Patent Office to Newport are on schedule for completion by September 1991. The trade marks branch has already begun to move and will be fully established in refurbished existing accommodation at the Duffryn site by May 1989. Construction of a new building on the same site for the remainder of the office will begin early next year. In the meantime, other posts are being transferred to temporary accommodation in the area. The move involves some 850 posts of which over 500 are expected to be filled by staff recruited locally in Wales.

Three-wheeled All-terrain Vehicles

Mr. Cran: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of the three-wheeled all-terrain vehicles recently withdrawn from the American market have now been imported into the United Kingdom; and how many are estimated to be in private hands.

Mr. Forth: My Department has responsibility for off-the-road vehicles that are for leisure use. We understand that between 2,000 and 3,000 of the three-wheeled racing ATV model TRI-Z-250 have been imported into this country from the United States of America. They are being sold through motor auctions, and we believe that about half of the above number is in private hands.

Mr. Cran: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will instigate an inquiry into the safety aspects of the off-road usage of three-wheeled all-terrain vehicles.

Mr. Forth: My Department has a considerable volume of evidence from the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, whose report led to the withdrawal of three-wheeled all terrain vehicles from the North American market, and we have also had discussions with the manufacturers and suppliers in Britain. I am considering what action may be required.

German Cars (Sales)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has as to how many cars the German motor industry sells in the Federal Republic and how many it sells in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins: In the first nine months of this year there were 1,467,271 new German manufactured cars sold in the Federal Republic of Germany. In the same period, there were 306,295 new German-made cars sold in the United Kingdom.

Off-course Bookmaking

Mr. Watts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will request the Director General of Fair Trading to consider the increasing concentration of off-course bookmaking in the hands of four major companies and whether a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission would be appropriate.

Mr. Maude: The Director General of Fair Trading announced on 7 January that, following detailed inquiries by his officials into the off-course bookmaking industry, he had decided not to refer the four major bookmakers—Coral, Ladbroke, Mecca and William Hill—to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The Office of Fair Trading is continuing to monitor developments. If my hon. Friend has any new information to offer about concentration in the off-course bookmaking industry he should bring it to the attention of the Director General of Fair Trading.

British Steel

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will advise the British Steel Corporation to consider further the allocation of shares to those employees who were appointed to their post by the corporation and where the corporation continues to issue all or a significant proportion of the business where their employment continues.

Mr. Atkins: No. The preferential employee share arrangements which were agreed between the Government and the company and announced on 17 May 1988 are restricted to eligible employees of British Steel plc and its wholly owned subsidiaries. To have extended the coverage of these arrangements to include employees of the numerous other companies in which British Steel has a shareholding would have presented unacceptably complicated logistical and administrative difficulties.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many complaints have been raised in the last year regarding the supply of private hearing aids; and what has been the least common cause of complaint.

Mr. Forth: My Department has received one complaint about the supply of hearing aids in the last year. I understand that the Hearing Aid Council has received 79 representations in the same period. The most common cause of complaint was dissatisfaction with the quality of after-sales service.

European Community (State Aids)

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on European Community arrangements for monitoring the repayment of state aids granted by European Community Governments, which the European Commission and the European Court of Justice find to have been awarded in breach of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is the responsibility of the European Commission to secure repayment of any aid which it or the European Court of Justice decide is incompatible with the treaty of Rome. In such a case, the Commission will ask the member state how it intends writing a specified timetable, to comply with the decision. The Commission then reviews progress regularly and may enter into further discussion with a member state which is slow or has difficulty in reclaiming the aid, in order to ensure compliance with the decision.

National Engineering Laboratory

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made in selecting a purchaser for the national engineering laboratory at East Kilbride; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* Following the withdrawal of YARD Ltd. from negotiations to acquire NEL, my right hon. and noble Friend has concluded that some restructuring is likely to be necessary over the next two years in order to achieve successful privatisation as soon as practicable. To this end Touche Ross management consultants have been commissioned to undertake a detailed study of the laboratory (to be completed by 15 April 1989), to plan the restructuring and the way forward towards privatisation. The study will examine those of NEL's activities which will continue to be needed to support Government functions as well as identifying any scope for involvement of higher education institutions for example by creating a technology centre. It will look at the scope for future development of the NEL site in order to reduce overheads and attract additional employment. Finally the study will advise whether there are programmes within NEL for which there is no current or future Government need and which receive inadequate industrial support. The terms of reference of the study have been placed in the Library of the House.

To assist the restructuring study and its implementation, I intend to appoint a supervisory board including some members drawn from industry and commerce. The board's role will be non-statutory and advisory and it is expected that it will be appointed for 18 months with a possibility of subsequent extension.

The names of those to be appointed to the supervisory board will be announced shortly.

The study is likely to contain commercially sensitive information and it is unlikely that it will be published.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Department Houses

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers' houses have been sold at each London prison.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In the period from 1 April 1982 to 31 October 1988, the numbers sold were:

	Number
Brixton	56
Holloway	2
Pentonville	22
Wandsworth	32
Wormwood Scrubs	12

Information in respect of the period before 1 April 1982 is not readily available.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers' houses are allocated to prison officers at each London prison.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 31 October 1988, the numbers allocated, including flats, were:

	Number
Brixton	323
Holloway	166
Pentonville	195
Wandsworth	207
Wormwood Scrubs	336

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, as at 31 October, how many prison officers' houses had been sold in England and Wales.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In the period from 1 April 1982 to 31 October 1988, 4,020 prison officers' houses were sold in England and Wales. Information in respect of the period before 1 April 1982 is not readily available.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the money from the sale of prison officers' housing is spent by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Income from the sale of prison officers' quarters is treated as an appropriation-in-aid, and thereby forms part of the total net provision for the prison service in England and Wales: as such it cannot be separately identified.

Prison Visits

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the prison rules on visits between husband and wives who are both serving prison sentences; how often such visits are allowed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The rules in question are contained in prison standing order 5A 19, a copy of which is in the Library.

Prisoners (Transfers)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the procedures followed by his Department regarding prison inmates who are being recommended for transfer to Broadmoor hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The following are the present procedures.

If a prison medical officer considers that an inmate is suffering from a form of mental disorder of such nature or degree that he should be removed to hospital for treatment under the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983, arrangements are made for the inmate to be examined by a second medical officer. In cases where the prison medical officer considers that treatment would be required in conditions of maximum security, the second medical officer would be a consultant psychiatrist at one of the four special hospitals. If both doctors agree as to the nature or degree of mental disorder reports would be submitted to the Department of Health's admissions panel. If admission is agreed the panel would consider which of the four special hospitals, including Broadmoor, would be appropriate. On being satisfied that the statutory criteria have been met, my right hon. Friend can then sign a warrant directing the inmate's transfer.

Women's Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often women inmates at Holloway prison are allowed to bath or shower; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: All the women inmates at Holloway prison are allowed a bath or shower as often as staffing permits, which is usually daily.

Passports

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the increase in passport applications since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The increase in demand, in terms of the number of standard passports issued, is as follows:

Year	*Standard passports issued*
1979	1,809,091
1987	2,041,220
1988 (January-October)	[1]2,171,858

[1] Provisional total.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of extra permanent and temporary staff recruited by passport offices since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The information, covering the six United Kingdom passport offices, is as follows:

Year	*Highest number of staff in post in any month*[1]	
	Permanent staff	*Casual staff*
1979	901	182
1988	956	285

[1] Includes headquarters staff.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of hours of overtime worked in each passport office in 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The information is shown in the table below.

Hours of overtime worked during 1987

Passport office	*Hours*
London	38,213
Liverpool	43,591
Peterborough	13,083
Newport	28,345
Glasgow	16,269
Belfast	Nil
Total	139,501

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the cost to public funds of payments for overtime made to passport office staff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The cost of running the passport service, including salaries, is reflected in the level of passport fees, and does not represent a net charge to public funds.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has made any forecasts of passport application levels to 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The latest estimate of demand for standard passports to the end of 1990 is as follows:

	Million
1988	2·4
1989	2·75
1990	3·0

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the passport issuing computer system to become fully operational; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The system is already fully operational in Glasgow. It should have been extended to all other passport offices in the United Kingdom by the end of 1989.

Police

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report fom the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the action taken by mounted and other police on the Victoria embankment on the west side of Westminster bridge between 3.15 pm and 3.45 pm on Thursday 24 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the National Union of

Students organised the marches which took place last Thursday in protest against the Government's proposals for student loans. The NUS had agreed the routes with the police beforehand.

The main march was due to follow a route from Malet street to Geraldine Mary Harmsworth park via Waterloo bridge. On the day, up to 17,000 people took part in this march. On crossing Waterloo bridge at about 1.20 pm a group of approximately 1,000 demonstrators, who were outside the control of NUS stewards, broke through a police cordon and proceeded along York road. This was not part of the agreed route.

The action of those marchers, who are believed in the main to have comprised members of the Socialist Workers party, encouraged several thousand others to follow suit. This body of demonstrators went to the south side of Westminster bridge, where their way was barred by police so that the Sessional Order of the House, which requires the Commissioner to keep the streets leading to the Palace of Westminster free for Members, was not breached.

For about two and half hours the police on the south side of Westminster Bridge came under intense pressure from large numbers of demonstrators who tried to break through. Missiles, including placard poles, cans, bottles and coins, were thrown at the police. A number of officers were injured by the missiles and by the efforts of the demonstrators to break through the police line. NUS stewards and the police made loudhailer requests to the demonstrators to return to the march and rally, but with no effect.

Just before 4 pm, after warnings had been given, mounted officers were deployed to disperse the crowd. I understand that this was a controlled action in which foot officers were also involved and that it was not a charge. I further understand that truncheons were neither drawn nor used. Throughout the afternoon police also had to deal with significant numbers of demonstrators at other locations; for example, at about 3.25 pm a group of demonstrators was dispersed along Victoria embankment towards Richmond terrace.

During the afternoon there were some 72 injuries to officers and five to horses. The police are aware that seven demonstrators were injured; 69 people were arrested and 50 charges have been brought, mainly for public order offences; 1,500 officers and over 70 vehicles were employed in the operations. The additional cost of policing was £27,462. I understand that a few complaints about the action of individual officers have been made. These are being investigated in accordance with the statutory procedures.

The NUS co-operated with the police both before and during the marches and the police made what arrangements they could to enable demonstrators to lobby Parliament in a way which did not breach the Sessional Order. I understand that some numbers did so. If the breakaway group had not left the march and had followed the prescribed route the disruption to traffic would not have been so great. Interruption to traffic flow is one of the factors which the police take into account when discussing with organisers the proposed route of a march. Where necessary the police can use powers in the Public Order Act 1986 formally to impose conditions on unco-operative organisers if they reasonably believe that the march would otherwise result in serious public disorder, serious damage to property or serious disruption to the life of the community. It was not considered to be necessary in this case because the NUS were believed to be co-operative and responsible. It was the determined violent action of a group which they were unable to control which led to the confrontation and disruption.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Criminal Proceedings (Jurors)

Mr. Cash To ask the Attorney-General what steps he is taking to ensure that the right of the Crown to stand by jurors in criminal proceedings is limited to exceptional circumstances following the abolition of peremptory challenge.

The Attorney-General: The enactment by Parliament of legislation abolishing the right of defendants in England and Wales to remove jurors by means of peremptory challenge makes it appropriate that the Crown in England and Wales should assert its own right to stand by only on the basis of clearly defined and restrictive criteria. During the Third Reading of the Criminal Justice Bill my noble Friend, the Earl of Caithness, undertook on my behalf at column 980 of the *Official Report* for 1 December 1987 that in future stand by would be exercised in only two situations. These are, first, to remove a manifestly unsuitable juror, but only if the defence agrees; secondly, to remove a juror in a terrorist or security case in which the Attorney-General has authorised a check of the jury list, but only on the personal authority of the Attorney-General.

Accordingly, I have today had placed in the Libraries of both Houses copies of guidelines on the excercise by the Crown of its right to stand by. The guidelines are to have effect from 5 January 1989 to coincide with the implementation of section 118 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, which abolishes the right of peremptory challenge.

I am also taking this opportunity to re-issue, and have placed in the Libraries of both Houses, copies of my guidelines on jury checks. These incorporate amendments made in 1986, together with a new amendment to paragraph 9 whereby the Attorney-General's personal authority is required before the right to stand by can be exercised on the basis of information obtained as a result of an authorised check.

Family Law Reform Act 1987

Miss Lestor: To ask the Attorney-General whether the Government will bring the outstanding parts of the Family Law Reform Act 1987 into force within the next year; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Government hope to bring those parts of the Act relating to parental rights and duties, custody and financial provision for children, and registration of birth where the parents are unmarried, into force on 1 April 1989.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Students (Statistics)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of home students entered university undergraduate courses in

Great Britain and Council for National Academic Awards first degree courses in England did not have two or more A level passes or Scottish highers in each year since 1979.

Mr. Jackson: The available information is given in the table below:

Proportion of entrants to university in undergraduate courses and all public sector first degree courses[1] who do not have two or more A-level passes or Scottish Highers

	University (Great Britain) United Kingdom domiciled	*Public Sector (England) All students*
1980	9·2	..
1981	8·6	..
1982	8·8	..
1983	..	..
1984	8·6	30·4
1985	14·7[2]	33·9
1986	15·9	33·3
1987	17·2	35·2

.. Not available.

[1] Includes entrants to CNAA and university validated degree courses.

[2] From 1985 onwards the basis of the university figures changed. The figures for 1985 to 1987 include students aged 21 and over who have A-level or Scottish Higher qualifications, as well as all entrants with other qualifications.

Vivisection

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made in reducing the number of primates for purposes of vivisection in the establishments for which he is responsible.

Mr. Jackson: All proposals which involve the use of animals in scientific experiments must be licensed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department, under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Such proposals are subject to very careful scrutiny—including the scope for using alternative experimental approaches not involving live animals. The establishments for which my right hon. Friend is responsible, and which use animals in experimental or other scientific procedures, are subject to the Act's provisions.

Superannuation Schemes

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science why the universities superannuation scheme is no longer transferable to the National Health Service superannuation scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I understand that accrued pension benefits in the universities superannuation scheme are transferred to the National Health Service superannuation scheme on a regular and substantial basis.

PRIME MINISTER

Birmingham

Q19. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Birmingham.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

European Council

Q29. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the topics she expects to be placed on the agenda at the meeting of the European Council at Rhodes on 2 and 3 December next.

The Prime Minister: The Rhodes European Council is expected to be devoted to discussion on the Commission's article 8(b) progress report on completion of the single market, the EC's role in the wider world, and the environment.

Ministers (Exchanges of Letters)

Q40. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions she has in the exchange of letters with departing Ministers expressed the hope that the departing Minister would return to high office soon and resume his ministerial career.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave him on 15 November 1988 at column *543*.

Crown Immunity

Q59. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make it her policy that Ministers do not seek Crown immunity from prosecution for their Departments when the anticipated regulations on emissions into the atmosphere come into force.

The Prime Minister: The Government's policy on Crown immunity is that it should not lead to lower standards being accepted on Crown premises. It is reviewed in individual cases only where there appears to be evidence of cause for concern.

Engagements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

Mr. Calum Macdonald: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 29 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty The Queen.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Kampuchea

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there have been any developments in the move to offer aid and to recognise Kampuchea on the part of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Chris Patten: We have no dealings with the illegal and unrepresentative regime in Phnom Penh. We are, however, contributing £100,000 to the Food and Agriculture Organisation/World Food Programme appeal for Cambodia, and last month I announced an additional allocation of £500,000 to support projects, including humanitarian projects in Cambodia, proposed by British voluntary agencies for assistance under the joint funding scheme.

WALES

Health Authorities (Pharmaceutical Staff)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those area health authorities in Wales which have reported a shortage of qualified pharmaceutical staff.

Mr. Grist: There have been reports of difficulties in the recruitment of qualified hospital pharmaceutical staff in a number of health authorities in Wales. The latest information held by the Department on the level of vacancies in health authorities in Wales relates to the position as at 31 December 1987 and is as follows:

District Health Authority	*Whole time equivalent vacancies for qualified pharmacists*[1]
Clwyd	6·5
East Dyfed	2·0
Gwent	7·0
Gwynedd	0·3
Mid Glamorgan	5·0
Pembrokeshire	0·0
Powys	0·0
South Glamorgan	8·0
West Glamorgan	5·0

[1] Difference between funded establishment and staff in post. Includes pre-registration graduates.

Hospital pharmacy manpower has been the subject of a recent joint review by the manpower steering group established by the Department and the Welsh pharmaceutical committee. The report of that review has made a number of recommendations for action to mitigate the effects of recruitment difficulties and shortages among hospital pharmacy staff and to improve pharmacy services within the NHS in Wales. The report will shortly be issued with a view to early implementation of its recommendations as appropriate and I shall place a copy in the Library of the House.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of *(a)* the impact of the Severn bridge on the economy of Cardiff and South Glamorgan and *(b)* the impact of bridge closures and queues on the business promotion of south Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: There can be no doubt that the Severn bridge and the M4 are vital to the economy of Cardiff, south Glamorgan and the whole of south Wales in providing good, speedy communications to southern England and Europe.

I am aware of no evidence that the occasional traffic delays at the bridge or the very infrequent temporary closures have deterred business promotions in south Wales. Inward investment, the creation of new businesses, the fall in unemployment, and the clearance of derelict land have all been at remarkably high levels.

Elderly People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of *(a)* 65 to 70-year-olds, *(b)* 70 to 75-year-olds, *(c)* 75 to 80-year-olds, *(d)* 80 to 85-year-olds, and *(e)* people over 85 years old receiving private sector care.

Mr. Grist: The total number of residents aged 65 or over in private homes in Wales registered with local authorities under part 1 of the Registered Homes Act 1984 as at 31 March 1987 was 4,907. Disaggregation by age-band is not available. Neither is information available centrally for the number of patients receiving care in private hospitals, nursing homes and clinics (section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1984).

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of *(a)* 65 to 70-year-olds, *(b)* 70 to 75-year-olds, *(c)* 75 to 80-year olds, *(d)* 80 to 85-year-olds, and *(e)* people over 85 years old receiving National Health Service care.

Mr. Grist: The latest available information, for 1987, is given in the table:

Number of Discharges (including deaths) from NHS hospitals in Wales

Age (years)	*Number*
65-69	33,823
70-74	34,950
75-79	34,244
80-84	26,456
85 and over	18,657

The figures include all patients treated in NHS hospitals, including full paying patients.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of people *(a)* between 65 and 75 years old and *(b)* over 75 years old who have been identified as needing or having (i) hip replacements, (ii) cataracts, (iii) chest complaints, (iv) heart disease, (v) strokes, (vi) Parkinson's disease, (vii) Alzheimer's disease and (viii) osteo/rheumatoid arthritis.

Mr. Grist: Information in the form requested is not available centrally. The number of discharges (including deaths) from NHS hospitals in Wales in 1987 by each diagnosis is as follows:

Number of discharges (including deaths) from NHS hospitals in Wales, by age (years)

Diagnosis (ICD9 code)	*65-74*	*75+*
Cataracts (366)	1,472	2,357
Ischaemic heart disease (410-414)	3,822	3,526
Other heart disease (393-398, 401-405, 415, 416, 420-429)	3,171	4,383
Parkinson's Disease (332)	270	640
Rheumatoid arthritis (7140)	497	279
Alzheimer's Disease (3310)	25	53
Cerebrovascular disease (430-438	2,455	4,090
—of which cerebrovascular accident—4369)	(1,599	2,831)
Chest complaints:		
i. acute respiratory infection (460-466)	124	246
ii. other diseases of upper respiratory tract (470-478)	402	117
iii. pneumonia and influenza (480-487)	610	1,809
iv. bronchitis and emphysema (490-493)	1,067	825
v. other diseases of respiratory system (494-519)	2,539	3,345
Hip replacement (OPCS operation code 810, 811)	750	800

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the financial resources allocated to the National Health Service for the care of the elderly and *(b)* the number of units and staff specifically allocated within the National Health Service for the care of the elderly.

Mr. Grist: The major part of resources for the care of the elderly in the National Health Service is included in the discretionary allocations which health authorities distribute according to their own priorities. In 1988-89 the Welsh Office allocated an additional £1·4 million of central funds to Welsh health authorities aimed at providing care for the elderly, including the elderly mentally infirm and psychogeriatrics, and a further £0·34 million was allocated under the elderly initiative for approved schemes sponsored by Welsh health authorities.

Information on the number of units specifically allocated to the care of the elderly within the National Health Service is not held centrally. However, the number of beds allocated to the specialties of geriatrics, elderly mentally infirm and psychogeriatrics at 31 March 1988 in Wales was 4,603. The number of medical staff in the speciality of geriatrics at 30 September 1986 in Wales was 153 whole-time equivalents and the number of nursing staff working with geriatric patients at 31 October 1988 was 3,925 whole-time equivalents.

It should be noted that beds and staff recorded against other specialist areas may also be involved in the care of the elderly.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security Offices

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any proposals to close, or review the future, of social security offices in Nottingham.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Pensions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many retirement pensions are paid out nationally.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As at 31 March 1988 approximately 9·8 million people were in receipt of basic state retirement pension.

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the cost of abolishing the pensioner earnings rule.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The annual cost of abolition of the earnings rule would be about £250 million gross, before taking account of tax effects.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the following age ranges currently receive a full basic state pension: 60 to 65 years, 65 to 70 years, 70 to 75 years, 75 to 80 years, 80 to 85 years, 85 to 90 years and 90 years and over, identifying whether they are married or single.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is as follows:

Numbers in receipt of full basic state pension at 31 March 1988

Aged	*Numbers*
60-64	[1]719,840
65-69	2,241,140
70-74	2,003,720
75-79	1,706,150
80-84	1,087,660
85-89	509,990
90 and over	204,330

[1] Women only.

Information relating to marital status is not available.

Elderly Persons (Residential Homes)

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the current cost of social security payments for elderly persons entering nursing and residential homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 25 November at column *44*.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many elderly people are receiving social security payments in residential homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I regret that information is not available in the precise form requested. However, the total number of income support recipients in independent residential care homes was estimated to be 103,000 in May 1988. At the same time there were estimated to be 44,000 such claimants in independent nursing homes.

Disabled People

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Social Security Advisory Committee's report on benefits for disabled people will be published.

Mr. Scott: I understand that the SSAC's report "Benefits for Disabled People: a strategy for change" was published today. Copies of the report are available in the Vote Office.

SCOTLAND

NHS Consumer Survey

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the results of the NHS consumer survey done by Research Surveys of Great Britain.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend will consider what form of publication is appropriate when he receives the report of the consumer survey of the NHS from Research Surveys of Great Britain.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the cost of the consumer survey on the NHS in Scotland done by Research Surveys of Great Britain.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The cost is £105,000+VAT.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive the reports from Research Surveys of Great Britain on the NHS in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Early in the new year.

Higher Education

Mr. Robert Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will establish a central council for the funding of institutions in Scottish higher education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Education Reform Act 1988 provides for the funding of universities through the Universities Funding Council, and for that council to have a Scottish committee. The committee will discharge the functions outlined by my right hon. and learned Friend to the House on 1 April 1987. This will facilitate better planning of the university and grant-aided college sectors of higher education, funded respectively through the Universities Funding Council and the Scottish Education Department.

European Parliamentary Constituencies

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Boundary Commission for Scotland intends to conduct any supplementary review of European parliamentary constituencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The commission has informed me that it intends to consider the making of a supplementary report on the following six European parliamentary constituencies in Scotland:

Mid Scotland and Fife
Lothians
South of Scotland
Strathclyde East
Strathclyde West
Glasgow

In each case, I understand that the review has been occasioned by alterations to parliamentary constituency boundaries which those of the European parliamentary constituencies concerned no longer follow exactly.

National Engineering Laboratory, East Kilbride

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the proposed privatisation of the National Engineering Laboratory at East Kilbride; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* My right hon. and learned Friend has received representations from Ken Collins MEP and from the general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress expressing concern about the proposed privatisation. He also received letters from two parties with an interest in the possible purchase of NEL. The Department of Trade and Industry is currently examining the future of NEL in consultation with the Scottish Office, and my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will make an announcement in due course.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Palestine

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the proposed establishment of a Palestinian state.

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to recognise a state of Palestine; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The decisions taken by the Palestine National Council represent a modest but potentially important step towards a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, although we believe that the declaration of a Palestinian state does not help carry matters forward.

Baltic Republics

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to make representations to the Soviet Government on the subject of the Baltic Republics.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our policy remains that we do not recognise de jure the forcible incorporation of the former Baltic States into the Soviet Union. We regularly make this clear to the Soviet authorities. We are encouraged by recent signs that the Baltic peoples are increasingly able to express their views about their own future. We hope this process will continue.

Caribbean

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current state of relations between the United Kingdom and states in the Caribbean.

Mr. Eggar: Britain has diplomatic relations with all the independent countries in the Caribbean, but relations with members of the Commonwealth in the region are particularly close and friendly.

Human Rights (USSR)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he is currently undertaking with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on human rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Human rights are an established and important element of our bilateral dialogue, with individual cases raised as and when necessary. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State raises both such cases and the need for more fundamental changes whenever he meets Mr. Shevardnadze and these issues will of course be high on the agenda during the visit of Mr. Gorbachev on 12 to 14 December.

In addition we have bilateral official-level consultations on human rights; the next round is scheduled for early next year.

Multi-sensor Platforms

Mr. Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Government's investigations into the export to South Africa via West Germany of multi-sensor platforms containing components supplied by British Aerospace have been completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Inquiries are continuing.

Rights of the Child Convention

Mr. Dickens: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he proposes to monitor the forthcoming United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

Mr. Eggar: We have, since 1980, played an active part in the working group set up to draft the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. We shall continue to do so.

Norris *v.* Ireland

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in the light of the recent judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Norris *v.* Ireland, re-affirming that the complete illegality of consensual homosexual acts between males violates article 8 of the European convention on human rights, what steps Her Majesty's Government proposes to take to ensure that the law outlawing consensual homosexual acts between males in Gibraltar is brought into line with the court's ruling.

Mrs. Chalker: We have brought the Norris judgment to the attention of the Gibraltar authorities, who are considering the matter.

Vietnamese Refugees

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking to persuade other countries to accept more Vietnamese refugees who are at present in Hong Kong.

Mr. Eggar: Following our decision in May 1987 to resettle in this country a further 468 Vietnamese refugees from Hong Kong, we have taken every opportunity to urge other Governments to follow our example by expanding their resettlement programmes. We are continuing to press the case for increased resettlement from Hong Kong, in our bilateral contacts, in the appropriate multilateral fora and through UNHCR.

Mr. Douglas Celecia

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why and on what terms compensation was paid to Mr. Douglas Celecia, a witness to the Gibraltar shootings; and how much compensation was paid.

Mr. Eggar: On 1 July the Gibraltar Attorney-General agreed with Mr. Douglas Celecia to pay £10,000 in full and final settlement of an action commenced against the Gibraltar Commissioner of Police in the Supreme Court of Gibraltar claiming damages for the removal of 15 exposures of film taken possession of by the Gibraltar police. The 15 exposures identified members of the security forces involved in the shooting of the IRA terrorists. The Crown in Gibraltar retained copyright in the 15 exposures until the end of the inquest.

UNESCO

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to be in a position to consider rejoining UNESCO.

Mr. Eggar: Before we can even contemplate reconsidering our position on membership of UNESCO, we will need to be convinced that fundamental reforms in both the administration and the programme policies of UNESCO are being implemented, not just considered. The very earliest opportunity we will have to assess the future programmes and management of the organisation will be after the conclusion of the general conference in late 1989. For us to consider a possible reassessment of the situation before then would be premature and unrealistic.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the figures on table 11 of annex 4 of Cmnd. 9756 and those applicable under his revised scheme at current rates of income tax; and if he will provide separate figures for *(a)* higher rate taxpayers and *(b)* those who have opted for the wife's earnings election where neither spouse is currently subject to higher rate tax;

(2) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the figures in table 10 of annex 4 of Cmnd. 9756, showing those applicable under his revised scheme at current rates of income tax;

(3) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the figures in paragraph 19 and table 8 of annex 4 of Cmnd. 9756 and those applicable under his revised scheme at current rates of income tax;

(4) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the figures in paragraph 20 and table 9 of annex 4 of Cmnd. 9756 and those applicable under his revised scheme at current rates of income tax;

(5) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the figures in chart 6.1 Cmnd. 9756 against the current position and that proposed for 1990-91 at present rates.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The detailed comparisons requested between the effects of the system of transferable allowances in Cmnd. 9756 and the change to independent taxation from April 1990 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the information he has about capital gains tax rates in France, West Germany, Japan and the United States of America and giving the comparable rates in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The latest information available is contained in the table.

Nominal rate(s) of tax on gains of individuals

Country	*Per cent.*
France[3]	16
West Germany[1 2]	22-56
Japan[1 4]	10·5-60
United States of America[1]	15 and 28
United Kingdom[1]	25 and 40

Notes

[1] Rate(s) determined by adding gains to income.

[2] Tax charge generally confined to short-term gains and substantial shareholding in companies. Proposals are under more comprehensive taxation of gains.

[3] Gains on portfolio investments generally exempt if less than in specified annual limit: special provisions for long-term gains.

[4] Gains on portfolio investments at present generally exempt, but there are proposals for taxing such gains. Special provisions for long-term gains.

THE ARTS

Museum Year

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Minister for the Arts how many museums are participating in Museum Year; and if he will make a statement as to the current level of public interest in museums in Britain.

Mr. Luce: The information provided by the Museums Association, which is organising Museums Year, is that well over 1,000 museums are expected to participate in the Museums Year celebrations.

The level of public interest in museums is very encouraging. The number of visitors to museums and galleries rose from 68 million in 1985 to 73 million in 1986. The Museums Association estimates that visitor numbers could top 100 million during Museums Year 1989.

HEALTH

Home Chiropody Service (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will call for a report on the ending of the home chiropody service in the Nottingham district health authority area.

Mrs. Currie: The criteria for domiciliary (home) chiropody services in Nottingham health authority are being reviewed. Approximately 25 per cent. of chiropody service contacts have previously been in the domiciliary setting. The most effective way of delivering chiropody treatment is by concentrating on—

(1) a service in health centres and clinics;

(2) in conjunction with attendance at out patient clinics and day centres;

(3) a home service for those who are housebound by disability and/or have no means of transport to clinics.

The review is intended to deploy the available resources more effectively and ensure that more treatments are carried out overall and that the domiciliary service is concentrated on those patients who are truly in need of treatment at home.

All patients on the domiciliary list have been visited and given a letter by a chiropodist explaining that the domiciliary service as previously deployed is being suspended and all patients on the list reviewed. Where patients can attend a local clinic session or the treatment can be combined with day centre attendance this is being arranged. If patients are in need of continuing home treatment this will carry on as before. There will be written confirmation to patients who will be remaining on the home treatment list and this will reach them once the backlog of letters due to the industrial action by the postal services in Nottingham is cleared. In these circumstances I consider that the further action called for is not necessary.

Consultants and Community Physicians

Mr. Raison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* consultants and *(b)* community physicians have been suspended from their duties in each year since 1980; and for what reasons.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Greenhouse Effect

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that hospital energy programmes and transportation facilities do not add to the greenhouse effect.

Mrs. Currie: There is a highly successful energy efficiency programme in the National Health Service which since 1978-79 has achieved aggregate savings of over £300 million. Fossil fuel consumption is currently reducing at a rate of 2 per cent. per annum. We are reviewing our policies on transport in the National Health Service to see if the environmental impact can be reduced.

Contraceptives

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total annual cost of providing contraceptive services in England and Wales, including pharmaceutical costs and the overhead charge involved in providing such services.

Mrs. Currie: The available information relates to expenditure on family planning provided through health authority community health services, including overheads, the contraceptive fees paid to GPs and the estimated net ingredient cost of contraceptive drugs and appliances prescribed by general practitioners and dispensed by pharmacists. These give an estimated expenditure in 1986-87 of £86 million for England and Wales.

NHS (Laundry)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which sections of laundry within the National Health Service are *(a)* exempt and *(b)* not exempt from inventory control.

Mr. Mellor: Health authorities are responsible for providing efficient and cost-effective laundry services. Procedures for inventory control are determined locally but health authorities must report discrepancies if the total in one financial year is in excess of £5,000.

National Health Service

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the improvements that the regions are planning for the National Health Service as a result of the substantial additional moneys recently announced.

Mr. Mellor: Whilst details of regional health authorities' plans for 1989-90 will not be available to the Department until early next year, recent discussions with regions about their intentions for that year showed that, even before the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, all had identified significant areas for proposed service improvement. These include continued increases in numbers of patients treated in the acute sector and substantial projects to develop and improve community care.

Population Statistics

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people there are in the United Kingdom in the following age ranges: 60 to 65 years, 65 to 70 years, 70 to 75 years, 75 to 80 years, 80 to 85 years, 85 to 90 years and 90 years and over.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is as follows:

United Kingdom estimated resident population for ages 60 and over

Age groups	*Mid-1987 population (thousands)*
60-64	2,982·5
65-69	2,749·5
70-74	2,288·5
75-79	1,849·3
80-84	1,167·0
85-89	540·6
90 and over	219·2

Registered Voters

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the numbers of registered voters for the years 1973, 1978, 1983 and 1988 in the cities of Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield.

Mrs. Currie: The information requested is as follows:

Local authority	*Registered local government electors*			
	1973[1]	*1978*	*1983*	*1988*
Birmingham	767,093	759,290	760,402	749,033
Bradford	320,339	332,056	342,177	345,052
Bristol	310,137	309,443	309,310	296,025
Cardiff	204,354	206,172	209,453	208,507
Coventry	233,126	236,299	238,874	238,914
Edinburgh City	352,703	359,262	366,654	366,102
Glasgow City	663,518	610,529	586,525	561,512
Leeds	537,444	541,681	548,630	527,893
Liverpool	420,610	407,524	393,088	365,893
Manchester	364,516	352,580	343,404	328,112
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	222,901	225,369	225,592	221,157
Sheffield	420,292	419,686	424,841	421,084

[1] Figures for 1973 have been adjusted to relate to districts constituted after the 1974 local government reorganisations.

Community Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community psychiatric nurses there have been in each health region in each of the last two years.

Mr. Mellor: Information in the exact form requested is not available. However, the number of nursing staff employed in the community psychiatric service in each regional health authority at 30 September 1986 and 1987 is shown in the table.

Community Psychiatric Nursing Staff[1]*: England 30 September*

wholetime equivalent[2]

Regional health authority	*1986*	*1987*
England	2,530	2,770
Northern	160	180
Yorkshire	200	220
Trent	260	290
East Anglian	110	110
North West Thames	170	160
North East Thames	140	180
South East Thames	210	150
South West Thames	210	220
Wessex	180	200
Oxford	120	120
South Western	150	200
West Midlands	250	290
Mersey	160	190
North Western	230	280
London PG Special Health Authorities	[3]	[3]

Source:

D of H annual census of NHS non-medical manpower.

Notes:

[1] These figures include all registered and enrolled nurses and unqualified nursing staff employed in the community psychiatric service. It is not possible to identify separately those who have undertaken the post-basic specialist course in community psychiatric nursing.

[2] All figures independently rounded to nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.

[3] Less than five whole-time equivalents.

Health Authorities (Emission Controls)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether health authorities will be liable to prosecution if they do not conform with new controls on emission expected to come into force next year.

Mrs. Currie: Yes.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will name the seven health authorities which, in the last 12 months, did not comply with statutory standards on emission to the atmosphere and the operation and maintenance of hospital incinerators and because the matter could not be resolved locally were referred to the regional health authorities; what action was taken by his Department to find out whether or not the health authorities did eventually comply with the statutory requirement; and how many such references were made to the regional health authorities in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Currie: Referrals were made about incinerators operated by the Bloomsbury, Cambridge, Leicester, Liverpool, North West Hertfordshire, Parkside and Sheffield district health authorities. The Department is monitoring the outcome of the regional health authorities' intervention; in some cases remedies are still under consideration. Full details of past referrals are not readily available, but we estimate they have averaged three or four per annum over the last five years.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he intends to permit the prosecution of health authorities which do not meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act 1956; and if there are any plans to repeal section 22 of this Act.

Mrs. Currie: No, because all referrals to the Department under section 22 of the Clean air Act are thoroughly investigated and, if health authorities are not Crown immune from the planned new controls on emissions, they will become liable to enforcement of these controls.

Hospital Incinerators

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long the transitional period allowed for the replacement of existing hospital incinerators which do not meet the new proposed controls on emission will be; what is the normal life of a hospital incinerator; and what evidence he has concerning whether the private sector can dispose of clinical waste more efficiently or cheaply than health authorities.

Mrs. Currie: No decision has yet been taken on the length of the transitional period, but it is intended to provide for the replacement of incinerators which are incapable of operating within the more stringent controls. Pending replacement health authorities will be required to upgrade the performance of their plant as near to the new standard as is practicable. I am advised that the average life of a hospital incinerator is 15 years.

Health authorities' decisions on how to dispose of clinical waste are made by local option appraisal. Since outcomes vary depending upon local circumstances it is not possible to generalise about the relative cost of in-house and private sector disposal.

Community Health Councils (Emission Controls)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will encourage community health councils to inquire into whether their local hospitals are keeping to statutory levels regarding the emission of carcinogens, pathogens, and other toxic chemicals; and if he will ensure that they receive the basic information that will enable them to make informed inquiries.

Mrs. Currie: Community health councils were established to represent the views of patients in their districts. They are independent of the Department and it would not be appropriate for the Department to encourage them to perform particular functions, especially those for which they have no special expertise.

Air Pollution

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he received a copy of the report from the National Society for Clean Air entitled "Air Pollution from Crown Property"; what response he made to the society; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: Yes; we have asked regional health authorities to investigate the operation of those hospital incinerators cited in the report of which we had no previous knowledge. We have also informed the society of our intentions regarding the application of planned new emission controls to the National Health Service.

Pharmaceutical Staff

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those district health authorities in England which have reported a shortage of qualified pharmaceutical staff.

Mr. Mellor: We are aware of some reports of vacancies in some districts for qualified pharmaceutical staff, but we do not collect this information centrally.

Opren

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has as to the extent to which patients suffered photosensitivity after taking Opren could be vulnerable to acute radiation skin reaction; and, if appropriate, if he will advise consultants to identify such patients before recommending radiation treatment.

Mr. Mellor: I am aware of a case in the *Lancet* of 15 October 1988 describing an acute radiation-induced cutaneous reaction in a patient with persistent photosensitivity who had been treated previously with Opren. It is normal medical practice for radiotherapists to check patients' medical history before treatment in order to identify possible factors such as a history of photosensitivity which might cause a skin reaction to radiotherapy. Such possible risks have to be weighed against the benefits of radiotherapy and risks and benefits of other possible treatments.

Hospital Visits

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals he has visited since his appointment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Since I was appointed I have visited on official ministerial visits:

Cannock community hospital
Bristol royal infirmary
Southend hospital
Royal Victoria infirmary, Newcastle
Freeman hospital, Newcastle

I have also met many health service medical, nursing and other professional staff and also managers and chairmen.

Nurses (Regrading)

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to accept any offer by unions representing the nursing profession to submit the current dispute over interpretation of the new grading agreement to binding arbitration, or to refer the dispute to ACAS.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke No.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has issued any guidance to health authorities about dealing with inquiries from the press during the current dispute about the grading of nurses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: No guidance has been issued.

NHS Spending

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was Government spending on the National Health Service per household as a proportion of the average household income in 1987-88.

Mr. Mellor: Gross NHS expenditure per household in the United Kingdom represented 6·8 per cent. of average household income in 1987, as against 6·3 per cent. in 1978.

Ambulances (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated overspend on the north-west regional health authority's ambulance budget by the end of the current financial year; whether he proposes to take any action in regard to the closure of ambulance stations in greater Manchester due to the lack of crews; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information he has as to how many ambulance stations have been closed in greater Manchester in the last 12 months; for what length of time and for what reasons; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what information he has as to the number of occasions in the last 12 months in which ambulances have been turned away from the first accident and emergency department they called at in greater Manchester, and as to the reasons for such refusal; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: We do not hold information centrally on these matters. The hon. Members may wish to address their inquiries to Mr. Bruce Martin, QC, chairman of north-west regional health authority who has responsibility for the management of ambulance services in greater Manchester, and the allocation of resources for ambulance services, as a whole, throughout the north-western region.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his best estimate of the number of people who would benefit from wearing a hearing aid.

Mrs. Currie: The Institute of Hearing Research claims that there are 3·2 million adults over 18 years of age in England and Wales who have a hearing loss of at least 35 decibels in the better ear and who might therefore benefit from having a hearing aid fitted.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hearing aid centres there are in the United Kindom and what is the average wait for an appointment.

Mrs. Currie: There are 179 hearing aid centres in England and Wales. According to a survey carried out in 1986 by the British Association of Audiology Technicians, the average waiting time in the United Kingdom is 7·2 weeks.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hearing aids were fitted in the last year for which figures are available; how many were for *(a)* children and *(b)* pensioners; and what proportion were private aids supplied by the National Health Service.

Mrs. Currie: Around 150,000 hearing aids were fitted to new patients in England and Wales in the Financial year 1987-88. We cannot say how many were for children and pensioners but around 4 per cent. would be private aids supplied by the National Health Service.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has about the number and percentage of people who do not wear their National Health Service hearing aid after it has been provided.

Mrs. Currie: The best information we have is from the Institute of Hearing Research, which estimates that nearly a quarter of people who have a hearing aid do not use it.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many National Health Service hearing aids are currently being used by deaf and hard of hearing people; how many batteries are supplied annually; and from how many centres they are available.

Mrs. Currie: The vast majority of National Health Service hearing aids are behind-the-ear models and around 3·5 million have been issued since 1974. Over 20 million batteries are issued annually from 372 centres in England and Wales.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hearing aid centres operate an accelerated referral procedure; what proportion this is of the total; what monitoring there has been of accelerated referral; and what is his Department's policy on this procedure.

Mrs. Currie: The British Association of Audiology Technicians carried out a survey of just over 200 audiology departments and hearing aid centres in 1986. Of the 148 who replied, 91 had a system of accelerated referral. The organisation of audiology departments and hearing aid centres is the responsibility of district health authorities.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how may hearing aid centres have domiciliary visiting provision; to what extent it is used; and how many people are visited;

(2) what information he has regarding the number of people requiring hearing aids who would benefit from a domiciliary visit;

(3) what is the average length of time spent by National Health Service audiology technician fitting a hearing aid and advising on its use; and how many follow-up appointments are generally required.

Mrs. Currie: We do not hold this information centrally.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the types of hearing aids currently supplied by the National Health Service.

Mrs. Currie: The types of hearing aid in the National Health Service standard range are:

Code number	*Description*
BE11	Head-worn hearing aid, with induction coil and tone control, suitable for the moderately hard of hearing.
BE11	BE11 hearing aid in brown case.
BE12	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil suitable for the moderately hard of hearing.
BE13	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil and forward-facing microphone suitable for the moderately hard of hearing.
BE14	Head-worn aid with induction coil and tone control suitable for the moderately hard of hearing.
BE15	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil and tone control suitable for the moderately hard of hearing.
BE16	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil, tone control and forward facing microphone for the moderately hard of hearing.
BE17	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil, low cut tone control and forward facing microphone for the moderately hard of hearing.
B1702	BE17 hearing aid in brown case.
BE18	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil, low cut tone, 3-position peak clipping presets and forward facing microphone for the moderately hard of hearing.
BE19	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil, low cut tone control and forward facing microphone for the moderately hard of hearing.
BE31	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil, tone control and peak clipping for the moderately to severely hard of hearing.
BE31	BE31 Hearing aid in brown case.
BE32	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil, tone control, peak clipping and forward facing microphone for the moderately to severely hard of hearing.
BE33	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil, low cut tone control, peak clipping and forward facing microphone for the moderately to severely hard of hearing.
BE34	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil, tone control and peak clipping forward facing microphone for the moderately to severely hard of hearing.
BE35	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil, tone control and peak clipping, forward facing microphone for the moderately severely hard of hearing.
BE51	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil, low-high cut tone, peak clipping, combined MT presets and forward facing microphone for the severely hard of hearing.
BE52	BE52 Hearing aid in brown case.
BE53	Head-worn hearing aid with induction coil, independent low and high cut tone, peak clipping, combined MT presets and forward facing microphone for the severely hard of hearing.
BW61	Body-worn high power air and bone conduction hearing aid with induction coil, combined MT, low cut tone controls, low and high cut tone, adjustable peak clipping, adjustable maximum gain presets for the very severely hard of hearing.
BW81	Body-worn extra powerful air and bone conduction hearing aid with induction coil combined MT control low-high cut tone, adjustable peak clipping, adjustable maximum gain presets for the profoundly hard of hearing.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to provide a National Health Service in-the-ear hearing aid.

Mrs. Currie: In-the-ear aids are not included in the standard range of National Health Service hearing aids, but district health authorities have power to provide them if they are considered to be essential.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will seek evidence from consumer groups and those concerned with the welfare of the elderly regarding the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with National Health Service and the private supply of hearing aids.

Mrs. Currie: We are in touch with various voluntary and other organisations about hearing aid provision.

Ear, Nose and Throat

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many ear, nose and throat consultant posts are currently vacant; what percentage of National Health Service established posts is vacant; and what are the percentage figures for the last five years;

(2) what steps he is taking to reduce the number of vacant ear, nose and throat consultant posts.

Mr. Mellor: Information about the percentage of posts vacant is set out in the table. It is for health authorities to decide what action is appropriate to fill particular vacant posts. The Department's role is to ensure that there are sufficient fully trained surgeons to take up the posts available. On the advice of the joint planning advisory committee an additional 11 whole time equivalent senior registrar posts were agreed earlier this year to meet authorities' plans for additional consultant posts over the next 10 years.

Percentage of consultant posts without a permanent holder[1]
at 30 September: England
Ear, Nose and Throat Surgery (Otolaryngology)

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Number of vacant posts	29	28	26	16	14
Percentage[2]	7·8	7·5	7·0	4·4	3·8

Notes:

1. From 30 September 1986 the definition of a post without a permanent holder was amended to exclude posts for which a central manpower approval had been given which authorities had not the steps to establish. Central control over the establishment of new consultant posts in ENT was discontinued in 1984.
2. Posts without a permanent holder as a percentage of the sum of such posts and consultant staff in post in permanent paid posts.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average waiting time for an out-patient appointment to see an ear, nose and throat consultant; what has been the average time for each of the last five years; and how many districts currently have waiting times twice as long as the average or longer.

Mr. Mellor: We do not collect information on out-patient waiting times centrally.

Audiological Technicians

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many audiological technicians posts are currently vacant; what percentage this is of the National Health Service establishment; and what have been the percentage figures of vacant posts in each of the last five years.

Mr. Mellor: We do not collect information on vacant posts centrally.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase the supply of audiology technicians for the National Health Service.

Mr. Mellor: Any action needed is a matter for individual health authorities to decide.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the different types of specialist staff involved with audiological work giving the nature of their responsibilities, and their training.

Mr. Mellor: The main types of specialist staff involved with audiological work are ear, nose and throat surgeons, audiological physicians, audiological scientists, audiological technicians and hearing therapists. Their responsibilities cover a wide spectrum of work in respect of diagnosis, treatment and management of people whose hearing is impaired. Each group is trained in accordance with requirements specified by the responsible professional body or the appropriate employing authority.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long the training of audiology technicians lasts; and what proportion of this time is spent on work directly relevant to testing hearing for the provision of a hearing aid.

Mr. Mellor: The initial training of audiology technicians, leading to employment in the basic grade, takes two years. Of this time, a half to two-thirds is spent on work directly relevant to the testing of hearing prior to the selection and provision of hearing aids and in learning how to select and fit such aids. Further training of the technicians takes place in the basic and higher grades in the fitting of more complex and high-powered aids and in instructing patients in their use in a variety of home and work environments.

Waiting Lists

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if any estimate has been made of the potential savings to the National Health Service of treating patients at the earliest opportunity in relation to the cost of treating them when waiting lists allow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The savings are likely to be very small in relation to the overall costs of treatment. Most patients on the waiting list have relatively stable conditions and will cost no more to treat after waiting. However, it is obviously desirable for patients to be treated as soon as possible. This is why we have made an extra £55 million available so far through the waiting list fund, to help tackle excessive waiting times.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has made an allocation of additional funds available to health authorities to help reduce waiting lists.

Mr. Mellor: In 1987-88 £25 million was made available to health authorities from the waiting list fund to help reduce waiting lists and waiting times. In 1988-89 a further £30 million was allocated. I will shortly be making an announcement about allocations for 1989-90.

Elderly Persons

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he has any plans to establish primary care authorities to manage the funding of elderly persons entering nursing and residential homes; and if he will make a statement.

(2) if he has any plans to establish community care authorities to manage the funding of elderly persons entering nursing and residential homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We are considering the funding and management of public support for people entering nursing and residential care in the light of Sir Roy Griffiths' recommendations and will bring forward proposals in due course.

Mercury (Fish)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has as to the acceptable level of mercury in fish beyond which they become unfit for human consumption.

Mrs. Currie: There are no specific limits set for levels of mercury in fish for human consumption. However, the Food and Agriculture Organisations and World Health Organisation have jointly set a figure for the provisional tolerable weekly intake of 0·3 mg per kg per week, of which not more than 0·2 mg per kg should be organic mercury. This figure is for total intake from all sources, including fish, and incorporates a very large safety margin.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Appeals (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning appeals relating to Nottingham were made to his Department between May 1987 and November 1988; by whom they were made; and how many were approved.

Mr. Chope: Between 1 May 1987 and 20 November 1988, 41 planning appeals relating to Nottingham were made to my Department. Of these 12 were withdrawn before determination; and of the 18 decided so far, four have been allowed. Listed below are the appellants, and the outcome of their appeals.

Appellant	*Outcome*
Mr. J. Chi Ping Seung	Withdrawn
D. Mabbott	Dismissed
Bordgraine Property Services	Withdrawn
J. Steeples	Dismissed
Terence Doak Holding Services Ltd.	Dismissed
Mobil Oil Co. Ltd.	Withdrawn
Imperial Tobacco Ltd.	Withdrawn
Alliance and Leicester Building Society/ Prudential Portfolio Managers Ltd.	Dismissed
Mr. and Mrs. Sood	Allowed
Mr. and Mrs. J. Codal	Allowed
British Telecom	Withdrawn
Mr. and Mrs. Samialis	Dismissed
Morgram Holdings Ltd.	Allowed
Harcharan S. Sagoo	Dismissed
Mohammed Aslam	Dismissed
Peugeot/Talbot Motor Company Ltd.	Withdrawn
George Atkins Automatics Ltd.	Withdrawn
John Fox Ltd.	To be determined
Mr. V. E. North	Dismissed
Just Like That Properties Ltd.	Dismissed
Nottingham Regional Society for Autistic Children and Adults	Withdrawn

Appellant	*Outcome*
A. R. Marshall and Sons (Haulage) Ltd.	To be determined
N. Smith	Dismissed
P. Newman	Dismissed
Grosvenor Square Properties Development Ltd.	Withdrawn
Nottingham Regional Society for Autistic Children and Adults	Allowed
Gordon Atkinson	Dismissed
Richard Harkouk	Dismissed
N.F.C. Properties Ltd.	To be determined
British Gas	Withdrawn
R. Odolin	Dismissed
Michael Hope	To be determined
Grosvenor Square Properties Development Ltd.	To be determined
Mr. S. J. Hawley	To be determined
Grosvenor Square Properties Development Ltd.	Withdrawn
City Grove Development Ltd.	To be determined
Dr. Aulfat Rusool Ali	To be determined
Mr. J. A. Sekowski	To be determined
Grosvenor Square Properties Development Ltd.	Withdrawn
Mr. T. Kay	To be determined
Mr. A. Smith	To be determined

Hotel Project (Birmingham)

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations were held before granting a substantial sum to a hotel project in Birmingham; and what are the terms and conditions of repayment of the said grant.

Mr. Ridley: Two hotel projects in Birmingham have received urban development grant. In both cases, consultations were held with the developer and the developer's advisors, with Birmingham City Council which made the applications for grant, with the English Tourist Board and with other Government Departments. The specific terms and conditions attached to offers of urban development grant are matters of commercial confidentiality and are not disclosed.

Management and Maintenance

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assumptions were made about the increase in weekly council house rents for 1989-90 and the percentage increase in management and maintenance expenditure in 1989-90 compared with 1988-89 in the calculation of grant-related expenditure indicator E7, rate fund contributions to the housing revenue account, included in the exemplifications presented to members of the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance as paper CCLGF (88) 15.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* The E7 factor for 1989-90 included in the exemplifications produced for CCLGF assumed a rent increase of £1·65 per week and a 9 per cent. increase in management and maintenance expenditure. The rent increase was subsequently revised to £1·75 per week for the exemplifications in the consultation paper on the 1989-90 RSG settlement issued on 11 November.

Council of Ministers

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council on 24 November.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My noble Friend the Minister for Housing, the Environment and Countryside represented the United Kingdom at this meeting.

The Council transmitted a draft declaration on the environment to the European Council in Rhodes on 2-3 December for endorsement by Heads of Government.

I am pleased to report that the Council confirmed the provisional agreement reached in June this year for a second stage limit for small car emissions at 8 grams per test of hydrocarbons plus oxides of nitrogen (HC+NOX).

Ministers also reached agreement on proposals to harmonise national programmes for reducing pollution from the titanium dioxide industry. The provisions of the directive will lead to reductions in the amounts of pollutants discharged into North sea estuaries and will provide this important industry with a clear basis for planning its future investment. Council unanimously overruled the Commission recommendation for a legal base of article 100A of the Single European Act, in favour of article 130S.

The Council had a useful exchange of views on the draft directive on the contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms. The progress made was noted and it was recommended that further work be addressed as a matter of priority.

While almost all member states were prepared to contemplate Community action to help protect our natural heritage, the Commission's approach to a directive was unanimously rejected. There was general support for the United Kingdom's view that the Community could most usefully assist member states, where appropriate, to implement fully the Bern, Bonn and Ramsar conventions.

Progress was made in discussions on a draft directive on the prevention of air pollution from new municipal waste incineration plants.

The Council had an exchange of views on measures to protect the ozone layer. Most delegations supported the United Kingdom's proposal that the Community should call for the Montreal protocol to be strengthened by requiring an 85 per cent. reduction of world-wide emissions of chlorofluorocarbons by the turn of the century.

Interest was shown in a Danish proposal for a workshop in September 1989 on following up the recommendations of the Brundtland report.

Further consideration was given to a proposal for Community-wide programme of projects demonstrating how actions taken in the environmental field might contribute to employment creation.

The Council agreed a resolution on exports of hazardous waste to third countries, supporting wider international agreements on transfrontier shipments of waste. The United Kingdom presented its own proposals which were received sympathetically and will now be further considered in detail with the Commission and other member states.

Emissions

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his best estimate of the cost to the private sector of meeting the anticipated new controls on emissions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The proposed new controls over industrial air pollution will continue to be based on the principle that operators must use best practicable means to prevent emissions of harmful and offensive substances and to minimise the effects of any that cannot be prevented. Financial considerations are a factor in determining the best practicable means.

The Department produced a preliminary compliance cost assessment in November 1986, which rated the costs to industry of the proposed new controls as "tolerable".

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to permit a transitional period when the anticipated controls on emissions come into force to allow for the replacement of existing installations that do not conform to the higher standard.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We propose that plants undergoing substantial alteration would be required to meet the new standards immediately. Other existing plant would be allowed a transitional period during which they would be expected to be upgraded or replaced, as appropriate.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in recent negotiations towards a treaty to govern international trade in hazardous industrial waste in respect of *(a)* notification procedures in advance of shipments and *(b)* whether tacit or explicit acceptance is likely to be adopted; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Notification procedures under the global convention on the transboundary movement of hazardous waste currently being negotiated under the auspices of UNEP are likely to require prior notification by the exporter and explicit acceptance by the importing country before the shipment commences. We regard this as an essential element of effective control and is in line with the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in recent negotiations towards a treaty to govern international trade in hazardous industrial waste with respect to controls on exporters; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There is broad agreement in the negotiations that exports of hazardous waste should be prohibited unless there is prior notification by exporters and authorisation by the importing country.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in recent negotiations towards a treaty to govern international trade in hazardous industrial waste with respect to the definitions of *(a)* hazardous waste, *(b)* ecotoxic, *(c)* concentration strengths and *(d)* substance conditions; if such definitions are likely to be recognised internationally rather than depend on existing national definitions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: These matters are still under discussion. Steady progress has been made towards internationally accepted common definitions.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in recent negotiations towards a treaty to govern international trade in hazardous industrial waste in respect of the passage of waste through territory other than the importing state in transit; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It has been generally accepted in the negotiations that the convention should require prior notification of any state through whose land area hazardous wastes are to be moved.

Draft Flora, Fauna and Habitat Directive

Mr. Buckley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the outcome of the Council of Environment Ministers to discuss the draft flora, fauna and habitat directive on 24 November in Brussels; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) today.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the resources available to the Housing Corporation in 1988-89.

Mr. Trippier: The Housing Corporation's approved development programme for 1988-89 made provision for gross expenditure of £737 million after taking into account forecast receipts of £82 million. The Housing Corporation now estimates that receipts will reach a total of £122 million. This increase is mainly due to higher than expected receipts from the sale of housing under the corporation's low cost home ownership programme and from the recovery of housing association grant following sales of properties. I have decided that the corporation may use the excess receipts arising in the current financial year to supplement its development programme, thus enabling more housing to be provided for homeless families and others in housing need.

"The Way Forward"

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received a copy of the University of East Anglia's report on the responses to Nirex's discussion document, "The Way Forward."

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Yes. The report was published yesterday and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporation

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the date on which the Warrington and Runcorn development corporation is to be wound up.

Mr. Trippier: On 22 July 1987 my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) announced that 30 September 1989 had been set as the target wind-up date for the corporation. Consultations under section 41 of the New Towns Act 1981 with Cheshire county, Halton borough, and Warrington borough councils have been undertaken, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have considered the responses received. Having taken these into account, my right hon. Friend confirms his intention to wind up Warrington and Runcorn development corporation on 30 September 1989. The necessary order will be made next year.

Acid Rain (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has of the effects of acid rain in the Nottingham area.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* The Department is funding three research projects in the Nottingham area. One at Loughborough university of technology is looking at the impact of acid deposition on the vegetation and freshwater biota of three catchments on Beacon hill in the Charnwood forest. A second project at the university of Nottingham school of agriculture is looking at the effects of air pollution, including acid deposition, on agricultural crops. Finally the Department's building research establishment is currently investigating the effects of acid deposition in the stone work of Bolsover castle. Results from these projects have been and will continue to be published in scientific and technical journals.

RIMNET Monitoring Stations

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether RIMNET monitoring stations are manned 24 hours per day.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Forty-two of the 46 radiation monitors currently installed in the national radiation incident monitoring network (RIMNET) are at permanently manned meteorological stations. Periodic readings are taken at the other four sites.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment where is the nearest RIMNET station to Southport.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* Manchester.

Burial Sites

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the areas of open land in Greater London identified for possible use as mass burial sites in the event of war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* The location of graves would be a matter for local decision at the time having regard to a number of factors which are set out in the emergency planning guidance to local authorities issued by the Home Office.

Under the Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations, county councils and the London fire and civil defence authority are responsible for preparing plans for certain civil defence emergencies including providing "facilities for the disposal of human remains". The Home Office monitors the preparation and content of the plans. The "Emergency Planning Guidance to Local Authorities" issued by the Home Office contains the following paragraph headed "Disposal of Dead". Depending upon the immediate effect of the attack in their area, one of the priority tasks for districts or boroughs could be the burial or cremation of those killed. The location of graves and the method of disposal would be a local decision at the time, having regard to the availability of peacetime facilities, the location of the bodies, the availability of suitable temporary sites and the importance of avoiding contamination of water supplies. Temporary sites used for cremation or interment could be closed as soon as other permanent burial facilities could be brought into use. Wherever possible the name, sex, approximate age, place found and place buried or cremated should be recorded and passed to the nearest information centre or the emergency centre.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Garlic Production

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the total figures for garlic production in the United Kingdom for the last five years.

Mr. Ryder: The information is as follows:

Garlic	*Production (England and Wales)*	
	Area (ha)	*Tonnage*
1983	27	135
1984	50	250
1985	50	250
1986	50	300
1987	55	330

Source: ADAS estimates published in Prod Facts by the British Food Information Services.

Animal Feed

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will take to encourage the incorporation of surplus cereal crops into animal feed.

Mr. Ryder: The best way of encouraging greater use of cereals in animal feed is to reduce the price, and we continue to press for lower market prices for cereals. We also seek to manage the market in the United Kingdom in a way which will encourage the use of cereals by the feed industry, and this season we have obtained the release of 350,000 tonnes of feedwheat on to the domestic market.

Manufactured Food Products

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those categories of manufactured food products which will be required to be harmonised in order to comply with regulations drawn up for the internal market.

Mr. Ryder: The programme for harmonisation of food law in the European Community is covering the horizontal areas of food labelling, food safety and food hygiene which are relevant to all foodstuffs. There are no proposals to be developed in the area of compositional law for specific foodstuffs.

Pressure Stocks Licensing

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received regarding the future of the pressure stocks licensing system.

Mr. Donald Thompson: In July fisheries departments issued a consultation paper on possible amendments to the United Kingdom's licensing system for fishing vessels. We received a total of 32 written responses to that paper.

Sea Defences

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response he has had from coastal authorities to his recent announcement on expenditure on sea defences; and which areas will benefit most immediately from this announcement.

Mr. Ryder: Coastal authorities, like their counterparts inland, have welcomed the recent announcement of increased funding for a long-term programme of inland and sea defence works, which was the result of a comprehensive review of national flood defence needs. The additional funding of £25 million a year will allow much-needed improvement to the coastal and flood defence on the east coast and in other areas where schemes will provide protection to lives, buildings, and industry.

Beef and Sheep Premiums

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received on the proposals to end the variable beef and variable sheep premiums; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I continue to receive a number of representations on the Commission's proposals for the reform of the beef and sheepmeat regimes. Discussions on them in the Council of Ministers are at an early stage.

Nuvan 500 EC

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons it was decided that the use of the insecticide Nuvan 500 EC should be controlled under the Medicines Act 1968; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The use of NUVAN 500 EC for the treatment, control or prevention of disease or ectoparasitic infestation of fish is medicinal within the terms of the Medicines Act 1968.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Alton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what plans he has for authorising the ocean incineration of hazardous waste in the Irish sea.

Mr. Donald Thompson: None. The only approved marine incineration site is in the North sea. The Government committed themselves last year to phase out this method of disposal by the end of 1994 and have undertaken not to transfer waste for incineration in other sea areas in the meantime.

Fisheries Council

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Fisheries Council in Brussels on 28 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I attended the Council of Fisheries Ministers with my colleague Lord Sanderson, Minister of State, Scottish Office, in Brussels on 28 November 1988.

The Council agreed the guide prices for 1989. We secured a significant change with the introduction, for 1989, of a seasonal adjustment in the guide price for herring. This together with the inclusion of herring in the carry-over premium scheme which we secured in October is a substantial improvement. It should enable our industry to take advantage of the EC market support mechanisms which they have been unable to do this year, so as to achieve more orderly marketing. For other products of interest to the United Kingdom the price adjustments, where made, are marginal.

The Council also had a preliminary exchange of views on the Commission's proposals for total allowable catches and quotas for 1989.

Land Development

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy towards the protection from development of *(a)* the best and most versatile agricultural land and *(b)* other agricultural land.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

The Government's policy on development involving agricultural land is set out in my Department's Circular 16/87, issued in May 1987, and in planning policy guidance note 7 "Rural Enterprise and Development", issued in January 1988. Copies of both are in the Library. In summary, the best and most versatile agricultural land is a national resource which should in general be protected from irreversible development and should not be built on unless there is no other site available for the purpose. This does not mean that all other agricultural land is freed for development; in deciding any application for planning permission that affects it, the agricultural implications must be considered together with the environmental and economic aspects.

TRANSPORT

Cycles

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department is taking to encourage greater use of cycles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Our primary concern is with encouraging safer cycling by reducing the scope for conflict with other road users. We have a continuous programme of research and application studies from which we are able to develop publicity, technical advice and engineering standards. We have a well-established series of technical publications, which are available in the Library. I shall arrange for a set to be sent to the hon. Member direct. We are just about to consult local authorities and other organisations on a further local transport note. This aims to draw together the results of much of our recent work.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the recent representations he has received regarding the electrification of the midland main line and the Channel tunnel interchange to serve the east midlands.

Mr. Portillo: We have received 13 representations since the beginning of this year: four from members of the public (two of them from the same individual), five from Members of Parliament (including an early-day motion) and four from local authorities (including one letter on behalf of 17 councils).

Iwade Bypass

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a progress report on the construction of the Iwade bypass; when he expects to announce the draft orders for this route; and what are the reasons for slippage in the programme.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The next step is publication of draft orders. Timing is dependent on finalising the arrangements for a junction with Kent county council's Staplehurst road link. This is taking a little longer than expected. We hope to publish draft orders by about the middle of next year.

A249

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give a progress report on the plans for dualling the A249 from the Stockbury viaduct to Key street between the M2 junctions and the A2 junctions; when he expects to announce the draft orders; and what are the reasons for slippage.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: As I envisaged in replying to the debate on 11 May at column 445 we announced the preferred route last summer. We hope to publish draft orders about the end of 1989.

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will investigate and report on the number of incidents in recent months which have caused major holdups on the A249 single carriageway route from Key street to Sheerness.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Delays are not necessarily reported. We are aware of five incidents involving delays of more than 10 minutes in the last three months.

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the appraisal from Kent county council of the need for improvements to the A249 from Kingsferry bridge to Sheerness, including the adequacy of the existing crossing of the Swale.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Shortly.

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the latest accident statistics for the A249 from Iwade to Sheerness.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Between July 1985 and June 1988 there were 81 personal injury accidents (four fatal, 24 serious, 53 slight) on this length of A249.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects the first time-tabled train to run through the Channel tunnel.

Mr. Portillo: 15 May 1993.

M20

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he expects the M20 link between Hollingbourne and Ashford, and the Maidstone bypass expansion to be completed;

(2) when he expects to place the contracts for the M20 link between Hollingbourne and Ashford and the Maidstone bypass expansion.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We expect to let two contracts for the completion of the M20 between Hollingbourne and Ashford before the end of this year and in the spring, for completion in 1991. Timing of the Maidstone bypass widening will depend on the outcome of the statutory procedures. We hope that it will be completed by the time the Channel tunnel opens.

West Bromwich Expressway

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received details of the incident involving the leakage of nitric acid from a road tanker on the A41 West Bromwich expressway on Monday 14 October.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Investigation of this unfortunate incident is initially a matter for the police. They will refer any matter of concern to the relevant authority.

A1-M1 Link

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the commencement date for work on the A1-M1 link where it joins the M1.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Preparatory work for the M1-M6 interchange with the link road is halted as a result of an appeal by the Society for the Preservation of the Field of the Battle of Naseby against a High Court decision earlier this year in favour of the Department's line for the adjacent Catthorpe to Rothwell section of the scheme. Construction of the interchange could start by the end of 1989 if statutory procedures are completed satisfactorily.

Port State Control

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many inspectors are available for port state control; what is their location; and what are the ports for which they are responsible.

Mr. Portillo: There are at present 124 marine surveyors and radio surveyors available for port state control inspections. Their locations and areas of responsibility are as follows:

	Number
West of Scotland and Northern Ireland district (from the Scottish border to Cape Wrath, including Northern Ireland)	19
East of Scotland district (from Cape Wrath to the Scottish border near Berwick on Tweed)	16
North-Eastern England district (from the Scottish border to Fosdyke inclusive)	29
London district (from Fosdyke exclusive to Bognor Regis inclusive)	18
South and South-West England district (from Bognor Regis exclusive to Bull Point)	20
Bristol Channel and South Wales district (from Bull Point to South of Fairbourne near Barmouth)	11
Liverpool district (from Fairbourne near Barmouth to the Scottish border)	11

London Underground

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many station staff were employed on each of the lines on the London Underground in 1960, 1970 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Member should request this information from London Underground Ltd.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to assessments of the impact of the Severn bridge on the economy of Cardiff and south Glamorgan in determining his policy in regard to *(a)* tolls and *(b)* the need for a second crossing.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend takes account of the effect of tolls at the Severn bridge on the economy south Wales before he proposes increases. The decision to construct any trunk road takes into account the benefits to users and therefore the importance to the local economy.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those aircraft which meet chapter 3 aircraft noise requirements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The proportion of chapter 3 jet aircraft in the world fleet is increasing and has grown from 11 per cent. on 1 January 1982 to 33 per cent. on 1 January 1988. Chapter 3 jet aircraft known to the Department are:

Chapter 3

Aircraft	*Engines*
Aerospatiale SN601	JD 15D-4
Airbus A300 B2-202	CF6-50C1
B2-203	CF6-50C2
B2-320	JT9D-59A
B4-103	CF6-50C2
B4-203	CF6-50C2
605R	CF6-80C2A5
Airbus A310-221	JT9D-7R4D1 or E1
	CF6-80A3
A310-300	CF6-80C2A
Airbus A320-111 and 211	CFM-56-5-A1
Boeing 737-300	CFM56-3-B-1
	CFM56-3B-2
737-400	CFM56-3C
	CFM56-3B, 3B2
	CFM56-2
Boeing 747-200	CF6-50E
	CF6-50 E2
	JT9D-70A
	JT9D-7Q
	RB211-524B2
	RB211-524C2
	RB211-524D4
Boeing 747-300	CF6-50E2
	JT9D-7R4G2
	CF6-80C2-B1
	RB211-524D4
	JT9D-7R402
Boeing 747SP	JT9D-7A
	JT9D-7F
	JT9D-7FW
	JT9D-7J
	RB211-524B2
	RB211-524D4
Boeing 747 SR	CF6-45A2
	JT9D-7A
	PW-2037
Boeing 757-200	RB211-535-E4
	RB211-535C
	PW2040
	CF6-80A
Boeing 767-200	CF6-80A2
	JT9D-7R4D(A)
	JT9D-7R4D(B) and B2
	JT9D-7R4E and 4E4
	CF6-80C2-B2 and B4
Boeing 767-300	CF6-80A
	CF6-80A2
	JT9D-7R4D(B)
	JT9D-7R4E
	CF6-80C2-B4
	CF6-80C2-B6
BAe 125-1A	TFE731-3
	TFE731-3R
3A-RA	TFE731-3
400A	TFE731-3
400F	TFE731-3
600A	TFE731-3
600F	TFE731-3
700A	TFE731-3
800 and 800A	TFE731-5R-1H
700B	TFE731-3
BAe 146-100	ALF-502-R4
100	ALF-502H
100A	ALF-502R-3
200	ALF-502H
200A	ALF-502R-5
BAe 146-300	ALF-502R-5
Canadair CL 600	ALF-502
Canadair CL 601 Challenger	CF34-1A and 3A
Cessna 500 Citation I	JT15D-1
500/501	JT15D-1/-1A
550 Citation II	JT15D-4
551	JT15D-4
650 Citation III	TFE-731-3B-100S
Dassault Breguet Falcon 10	TFE-731-2
Mystere 200	ATF3-6-4C
Falcon 50	TFE-731-3-1C
	TFE-731-2
Falcon 900	TFE-731-5AR-1C
Gates Learjet	TFE-731-2-2B
	TFE-731-3A-2B
Israel Aircraft	
1124 Westwind	TFE-731-3-16
1125	TFE-731-3A-200G
Lockheed L1011	RB211-22B
−1	RB211-22B
−100	RB211-22B
−200	RB211-524B
−500	RB211-524B
	RB211-524B3
	RB211-524B4
McD DC8-71	CFM56-2-C1
72	CFM56-2-C1
73	CFM56-2-C1
DC10-10	CF6-6D
	CF6-6D1
	CF6-6D1A
	CF6-6K
	CF6-6K2
DC10-15	CF6-50C2-F
DC10-30	CF6-50C1
	CF6-50C/H
	CF6-50C2
	CF6-50C2-R
	CF6-50C2B
DC10-40	JT9D-20D
	JT9D-59A
MD-80	JT8D-209
	JT8D-217

Chapter 3	
	JT8D-219 JT8D-217A JT8D-217C

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent those aircraft meeting chapter 3 noise requirements and operating out of British airports have had their noise footprint measured; whether such extend beyond the areas of the airports from which they operate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Measurement of noise footprints is expensive so footprints are calculated by computer. The Department uses noise footprints mainly for assessing the night-time noise disturbance caused by particular aircraft types, and for this purpose it has standardised on the 95PNdb footprint. The areas of the 95NdB footprint are known for nearly all chapter 3 aircraft using British airports. Usually most of the footprint falls within an airport's boundaries. In any one case this depends upon the aircraft type and the relationship of the boundary to the runway. By contrast, footprints of the earlier non noise-certificated types spread very far beyond airport boundaries.

Vehicle Inspectorate

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the vehicle inspectorate annual report and accounts for 1987-88 are to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The annual report and accounts are published today. They provide a useful overall picture of the general condition of Britain's road vehicles. They record the vehicle inspectorate's continuing progress towards a business-like basis for carrying out their essential duties of annual testing, and spot-checks of the vehicle fleet. The inspectorate has now become an executive agency.

Well-maintained road vehicles are essential to road safety. We welcome the slight improvement in the annual MOT test performance of cars and light goods vehicles. It cannot be regarded as acceptable that a third of the vehicles presented for test fail to meet basic safety requirements.

We continue to be concerned at the poor condition of many heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles. The number of spot checks of lorries and buses was increased by a third and a tenth of the goods vehicles fleet examined. In the April special survey of public service vehicles carried out after the period covered by this report, there was a slight improvement compared with six months earlier. The vehicle inspectorate are targeting their efforts on operators with poor records and seeking to help promote good maintenance practice.

The Freight Transport Association, the Road Haulage Association and the Bus and Coach Council have been asked for their proposals to secure higher standards throughout their industries.

We shall also be exploring with operators and manufacturers the reasons for the unsatisfactory trend in trailer test failure rates and to identify any general issues this raises.

It will continue to be the Government's policy to take stringent enforcement action against operators who fail to maintain vehicles adequately.

DEFENCE

Publicly Owned Land

14. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reconsider the way his Department places a valuation on publicly owned land to be disposed of.

30. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reconsider the way his Department places a valuation on publicly owned land to be disposed of.

38. **Mr. Paul Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reconsider the way his Department places a valuation on publicly owned land to be disposed of.

Mr. Sainsbury: Before disposing of surplus property we obtain professional advice from within MOD, from the district valuer or from commercial consultants. They prepare valuations of surplus property on the basis of full open market value taking account of existing or established uses and, when appropriate, development potential.

US Dual-Capable Aircraft

17. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received any representations from the United States Government seeking the basing in this country of further dual-capable aircraft.

84. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received any representations from the United States Government seeking the basing in the United Kingdom of futher dual-capable aircraft.

114. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received any representations from the United States Government seeking the basing in the United Kingdom of further dual-capable aircraft.

120. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received any representations from the United States Government seeking the basing in the United Kingdom of further dual-capable aircraft.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The deployment to Europe of additional longer-range dual-capable aircraft currently based in the United States is one of the options being considered by NATO as part of the current review of its theatre nuclear forces. Work on the various options is continuing.

Northern Ireland (Troop Deployment)

18. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the number of troops deployed in Northern Ireland from 1979 to the present time.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) on 16 June at columns *227-28*. In addition, the figures for the number of troops deployed in Northern Ireland as at 30 June 1988 are as follows:

	Number
Regular forces	11,164
UDR	6,310

Low-Flying Aircraft

19. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new measures the Government are taking to improve the safety margins for low-flying aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: Every aspect of the safety of low-flying is under continuous review and changes are made whenever necessary. As I announced in the House on 20 October, the most recent change concerned the introduction of the new procedures in the night low-flying system, aimed at separating rotary and fixed-wing flying as much as practicable, and improving deconfliction throughout the system.

56. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on low-flying sorties over the Hexham area.

Mr. Freeman: The Hexham area, like most non-urban parts of the United Kingdom, is used by military aircraft undertaking essential low-flying training. The Government will continue to do all within their power to minimise the disturbance caused by low-flying training and to spread this activity as widely and fairly as possible throughout the country.

Brigade of Gurkhas

20. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors he is taking into consideration in deciding upon the future of the Brigade of Gurkhas.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We intend that there shall be a continuing role for the Gurkhas after 1997 within the British Army. The future of the Gurkhas is being addressed against the background of operational and resource factors likely to affect the British Army as a whole.

Other factors to be taken into account when considering the viability of a future Gurkhas force include provision of an appropriate career structure, a broad enough base to support the skills and trades required by an effective operational unit, the need to obtain a cost-effective return on investment in infrastructure in Nepal and the requirement for the force to be operationally viable in relation to its roles and deployments. No decisions have yet been taken on the long term future size, shape or role of the Gurkhas.

Portsmouth

21. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to visit Portsmouth in the near future.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend has no plans to visit Portsmouth in the near future.

Frigates

22. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will announce the tender for the next order of frigates.

89. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will announce the tender for the next order of frigates.

Mr. Sainsbury: As I said in my statement to the House on 11 July at column *32*, I expect tenders for the next batch of Type-23 frigates to be sought next year.

French Defence Minister

24. **Mr. Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the French Defence Minister; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend last met M. Chevenement at the meeting of WEU Defence and Foreign Ministers on 14 November, but their most recent bilateral meeting was on 7 July when a range of subjects of mutual interest were discussed.

Merchant Ships

25. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the numbers of merchant ships available to him in an emergency.

78. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimate of the number of merchant ships available to him in an emergency.

108. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the number of merchant ships available to him in an emergency.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Members to the answer that I gave today to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall).

Territorial and Reserve Forces

23. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the consultation scheme designed to encourage companies to release employees for service in the territorial and reserve forces.

42. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the consultation scheme designed to encourage companies to release employees for service in the territorial and reserve forces.

87. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the consultation scheme designed to encourage companies to release employees for service in the territorial and reserve forces.

124. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the consultation scheme designed to encourage companies to release employees for service in the territorial and reserve forces.

Mr. Freeman: I am pleased to report that there has been a most encouraging response to the campaign and, to date, over 350 major employers have pledged their support to employees joining the volunteer forces.

Gibraltar Shootings

26. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he was aware before the shooting of the three Irish Republican Army members in Gibraltar that there was no bomb in the suspected car.

128. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he was aware before the shooting of the three Irish Republican Army members in Gibraltar that there was no bomb in the suspected car.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. I refer the hon. Members to the answer that I gave to the hon Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on 3 November at column *740*.

NATO-Warsaw Pact (Force Levels)

27. **Mr. Caborn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has discussed with his North Atlantic Treaty Organisation colleagues the possibility of parity in conventional forces between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Warsaw pact; and if he will make a statement.

46. **Mr. Terry Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has discussed with his NATO colleagues the possibility of parity in conventional forces between NATO and the Warsaw pact; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Alliance nations are co-operating closely at all levels in preparations for the proposed new arms control negotiations on conventional forces in Europe. A major aim is to remove capabilities for surprise attack and large-scale offensive action. This will require, amongst other measures, the elimination of the superiorities currently enjoyed by the Warsaw pact in key weapon systems such as tanks and artillery.

Fishing Vessels (Submarines)

28. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the danger to fishing vessels from the entanglement of submarines in their nets.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Submarine commanding officers are aware of the need to give adequate sea room to surface craft, particularly fishing vessels deploying their gear, and are well trained in avoidance techniques. I am satisfied that everything possible is being done to minimise the risk of submarines becoming entangled with fishing nets.

Aircraft Losses

29. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the replacement costs of all aircraft which have crashed in the United Kingdom in low-flying exercises over the last 10 years and the budget allocation to cover aircraft losses in future years.

Mr. Freeman: It is not now our practice to publish the unit production—and hence replacement—cost of individual aircraft. Neither is it our practice to disclose details of future budgetary allocations for them.

Nuclear Force Modernisation

31. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on plans for nuclear force modernisation.

64. **Mr. Wall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on plans for nuclear modernisation.

105. **Mr. Heffer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on plans for nuclear force modernisation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Members to the reply which my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Defence, gave today to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock).

Procurement Policy

32. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new measures his Department is taking to achieve value for money in weapons and equipment procurement.

79. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new measures his Department is taking to achieve value for money in weapons and equipment procurement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Ministry of Defence is continually searching for ways to improve value for money in its purchase of defence equipment. We take every opportunity to introduce competition, and our fortnightly "Contracts Bulletin", and other publications, such as "Selling to the MOD", seek to encourage the widest possible range of companies to compete for our business. We continue to press for taut contracting, insisting wherever possible on firm or fixed prices, or on incentive contracts with a ceiling price. We are developing a fully professional approach to project management by instituting better training for project managers, and by integrating the contracts, finance and quality assurance staff into teams under the project manager.

Chemical Weapons

33. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on measures the Soviet Union is undertaking to maintain and increase its stock of chemical weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In April 1987 the Soviet Union admitted to the possession of chemical weapons and announced that the production of these weapons had ceased. The Soviet Union has subsequently indicated that it will destroy its chemical weapons according to the provisions of a chemical weapons convention which is currently being negotiated at Geneva. However, the Soviets have not provided evidence that would allow us to substantiate their claim to have ceased chemical weapons production.

Defence Expenditure

34. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what total financial resources the Government have allocated to conventional defence since 1979.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

Year	*Total expenditure (a)* *(1)*	*of which nuclear strategic force (b)* *(2)*
1979-80	9,177	126
1980-81	11,181	165
1981-82	12,607	269
1982-83	14,412	327
1983-84	15,486	382
1984-85	17,122	386
1985-86	17,936	509
1986-87	18,163	658
1987-88	18,849	852
Total	134,933	3,702

Total column (1) minus column (2): £131,231 million.

(a) Reflects the actual expenditure as recorded in the Appropriation Account without adjustment for definitional changes over the period.

(b) Reflects estimated costs.

British Aerospace (Explosives and Propellants)

35. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with British Aerospace on collaborative production agreements with non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries in relation to explosives and propellants.

51. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with British Aerospace on collaborative production agreements with non-NATO countries in relation to explosives and propellants.

94. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with British Aerospace on collaborative production agreements with non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries in relation to explosives and propellants.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor).

NATO (Short-Range Nuclear Weapons)

36. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on discussions within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on short-range nuclear systems.

50. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on discussions within NATO on short-range nuclear systems.

54. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on discussions within NATO on short-range nuclear systems.

97. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on discussions within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on short-range nuclear systems.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Members to the answer that I gave today to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell).

NATO (Defensive Strategy)

37. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals there are to alter the role of nuclear weapons in Britain's contribution to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's defensive strategy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no plans to change the roles of British nuclear forces.

NATO (Nuclear Planning Group)

39. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Scheveningen meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation nuclear planning group.

58. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Scheveningen meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation nuclear planning group.

60. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Scheveningen meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation nuclear planning group.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock).

Search and Rescue

40. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations he has received on the deployment of search and rescue helicopter services.

Mr. Freeman: During 1988 the Ministry of Defence has received some 2,200 representations on the deployment of search and rescue helicopters.

48. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the search and rescue flight at RAF Leuchars.

Mr. Freeman: I have nothing to add to my answer of 14 November to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) at column *416*.

Cruise Missiles

41. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has had with the United States Administration about the removal of cruise missiles based on British soil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Her Majesty's Government have been fully consulted on the timing of the removal of the cruise missiles from RAF Molesworth and RAF Greenham Common. The missiles have already been withdrawn from Molesworth and a declaration to this effect has been made by the United States to the Soviet Union. Current plans are for half the missiles based at Greenham Common to be withdrawn approximately midway through the three years drawdown period, which began on 1 June 1988, and for the remainder to be withdrawn towards the end of this period.

CND

43. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament since the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation summit in March.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Secretary of State for Defence has received five letters from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament since the NATO summit in March this year.

Soviet Union (Military Capability)

44. **Mr. Neil Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been any significant changes in the military capacity of the Soviet Union over the past two years.

127. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been any significant changes in the military capacity of the Soviet Union over the past two years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friends to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) on 9 November at column *185*.

NATO (Burden-Sharing)

45. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made about the degree of burden-sharing between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allies.

49. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made about the degree of burden-sharing between the NATO allies.

88. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made about the degree of burden-sharing as between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allies.

Mr. Younger: I regularly meet with colleagues in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and have frequently emphasised the importance of equitable sharing of roles, risks and responsibilities within the Alliance.

90. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures the Government are taking to implement burden-sharing within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Mr. Younger: At their meeting in May, NATO Defence Ministers commissioned a report on the sharing of roles, risks and responsibilities within the Alliance. The United Kingdom has participated fully in the preparation of this report, which is to be considered by the Defence Planning Committee this week.

Royal Ordnance (Explosives and Propellants)

47. **Mr. Buchan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reassess the extent to which the ability to produce sufficient supplies of explosives and propellants in the United Kingdom in time of crisis has been adversely affected by the sale of Royal Ordnance plc.

72. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reassess the extent to which the ability to

produce sufficient supplies of explosives and propellants in the United Kingdom in time of crisis has been adversely affected by the sale of Royal Ordnance plc.

100. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reassess the extent to which the ability to produce sufficient supplies of explosives and propellants in the United Kingdom in time of crisis has been affected by the sale of Royal Ordnance plc.

Mr. Sainsbury: The MOD reviews annually its future requirements for explosives, propellants and ammunition. Royal Ordnance has a five-year contract to supply a large portion of those requirements which runs until 1993. Any improvements in the efficiency of the factories involved will be of benefit in time of crisis as at other times.

Air Defence

52. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what resources the Government have allocated to the air defence of the United Kingdom since 1979.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Figures for the annual expenditure on the air defence of the United Kingdom are given in volume 2 of the annual statement on the Defence Estimates. These show that, since 1978-79, the Government have spent a total of some £5,488 million on air defence, with expenditure in each year as follows:

	£ million
1978-79	128
1979-80	145
1980-81	199
1981-82	287
1982-83	453
1983-84	579
1984-85	702
1985-86	730
1986-87	817
1987-88	717
1988-89	[1]731

[1] Estimate

Nuclear Weapons

53. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there are any contingency plans for the disposal of obsolete British-owned nuclear warheads.

62. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there are any contingency plans for the disposal of obsolete British-owned nuclear warheads.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government's policy is to dispose of obsolete nuclear warheads in a safe and secure manner.

Central Ordnance Depot, Donnington

55. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any intention to visit central ordnance depot, Donnington, to discuss with the trade unions future plans for the depot.

Mr. Freeman: Any plans which might affect civilian staff are subject to the Ministry of Defence's established consultative procedures which make provision for the trade unions to comment on the Department's proposals: I have no plans to visit Donnington solely to discuss any such proposals.

Nuclear Testing

57. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has discussed with his North Atlantic Treaty Organisation colleagues any new proposals to limit nuclear testing.

70. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has discussed with his North Atlantic Treaty Organisation colleagues any proposals to limit nuclear testing.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United States and the Soviet Union are currently engaged in talks and joint verification experiments with the aim of ratifying the threshold test ban treaty and the peaceful nuclear explosions treaty. United Kingdom and NATO Ministers have been kept informed of the current state of negotiations.

Trident

59. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current position regarding SSBN 07, Trident 3; and when he expects to place the order.

Mr. Younger: The invitation to tender for SSBN 07 was issued to Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. on 15 March this year. The firm's formal response to this has been delayed by the strike which took place between 8 June and 30 August. It is still planned to place the order for this submarine next year.

82. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the impact of the purchase of Trident on conventional defence spending.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the impact of the purchase of Trident on conventional defence spending.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Even at its peak we expect that Trident will absorb less than 6 per cent. of the defence budget. By far the greatest proportion of the defence budget will be available for investment in conventional forces.

123. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about progress on the Trident programme.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have nothing to add to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd).

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement on the implementation to date of the Trident programme.

Mr. Younger: The Trident programme continues to time and budget towards its planned in-service date of the mid-1990s. I hope to announce a revised estimate for the Trident programme early in the new year as well as providing a statement on its progress for the Defence Committee and Public Accounts Committee.

Dog Training

61. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress is being made with his review of dog training at the Royal Army Veterinary Corps, Melton Mowbray.

Mr. Freeman: The study conducted by Peat Marwick, management consultants, has been completed but the report has not yet been presented to the Ministry. I expect to receive it very soon.

Kuwaiti Defence Minister

63. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the Kuwaiti Defence Minister; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence last met the Kuwaiti Defence Minister in a visit to Kuwait on 12 July. A wide range of subjects of mutual defence interest were discussed.

Royal Ordnance plc

65. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what valuation was placed on the sale of intellectual property rights associated with the sale of Royal Ordnance plc; and what was the total number of such rights transferred.

69. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what valuation was placed on the sale of intellectual property rights associated with the sale of Royal Ordnance plc; and what was the total number of such rights transferred.

113. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what valuation was placed on the sale of intellectual property rights associated with the sale of Royal Ordnance plc; and what was the total number of such rights transferred.

118. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what valuation was placed on the sale of intellectual property rights associated with the sale of Royal Ordnance plc; and what was the total number of such rights transferred.

Mr. Sainsbury: There was no specific valuation placed on the intellectual property rights associated with the sale of Royal Ordnance plc. The sale was made on the basis of the price offered by the highest bidder for the whole enterprise, including the IPR. Such rights are not individually distinct and include sub items and overlapping rights and for that reason it is not possible to assign a meaningful number to the rights transferred.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the extent to which the ability to produce sufficient supplies of explosives and propellants in the United Kingdom in time of crisis has been affected by the sale of Royal Ordnance plc.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave today to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Buchan).

Bullying

66. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the steps taken by the armed services, and in particular the Army, to identify bullying tendencies at an early stage and to prevent those exhibiting such tendencies from receiving promotion.

Mr. Freeman: I have made it clear in a number of statements to the House, and the message has been put across in the Army at all levels, that bullying in the armed forces will not be tolerated in any form and that appropriate action will be taken against those against whom charges have been substantiated.

In my reply of 7 June 1988 to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) I gave a progress report on the implementation of the measures designed to stamp out bullying and to ensure that potential bullies are not put in positions of responsibility over young recruits. Among these were improvements in instructor training and in man-management training for young officers and NCOs. An improved man management training package for instructors is being implemented. The guidance on man management for officer and NCO training courses has now been revised and the pamphlet will be printed before Christmas.

In addition, we have now established the extra 102 posts designed to relieve those involved in training and supervision of some administrative tasks and we are in the process of establishing and inviting applicants for the WRVS posts.

A129 Helicopter

67. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the part to be played by Westland in the development with Agusta of a version of the A129 helicopter for the Argentine air force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Westland has informed the Ministry of Defence that it is not involved in the joint Italian/Argentine helicopter project.

Territorial Army (Recruitment)

68. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the costs of the current Territorial Army publicity recruiting campaign.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 11 November 1988 at column *321*.

NATO-Warsaw Pact (Forces)

71. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will detail the broad balance of *(a)* conventional and *(b)* nuclear forces between North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Warsaw pact; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Comparisons of the conventional and nuclear forces of NATO and the Warsaw pact are published annually in the statement on the Defence Estimates. In addition, NATO has recently published an assessment of the strengths of the conventional forces in Europe belonging to the countries of NATO and the Warsaw pact. A copy of the assessment, entitled "Conventional Forces in Europe: the Facts", will be placed in the Library of the House. Current assessments of force levels show that the Warsaw pact enjoys major superiorities in key conventional weapons in Europe. Although there is broad parity at the strategic level of nuclear forces, the Warsaw pact possesses significant advantages in the shorter range nuclear categories.

Racial Discrimination

73. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations he has carried out into whether there is any racial discrimination in the armed forces.

Mr. Freeman: The armed forces are subject to the Race Relations Act 1976 and no form of racial discrimination is tolerated. Complaints of racial discrimination brought by members of the armed forces are fully investigated under the redress of grievance procedures of the service discipline Acts.

European Programme Group

74. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will next be attending an independent European programme group meeting.

Mr. Sainsbury: European Defence Ministers agreed at their IEPG meeting in Luxembourg earlier this month that they should meet again in the middle of 1989.

NATO (Flexible Response)

75. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards proposals to replace the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's strategy of flexible response by one of non-provocative defence.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: NATO's strategy is non-provocative; Alliance forces will never be used except in response to an attack. We believe that flexible response provides the best means of maintaining deterrence and preserving peace.

Injured Personnel (Compensation)

76. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to change the compensation system for injured or disabled ex-service men.

Mr. Freeman: Since May 1987, when the law was changed, service men have possessed the same rights as civilians in being able to sue the Crown for damages in the courts. Those service personnel injured or disabled before last May, and who cannot sue in the courts, have access to the comprehensive system of "no-fault" benefits available under the war pensions legislation. No changes are proposed to this system.

Western European Union

77. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there have been any changes in the Government's priorities as chairman of the Western European Union.

111. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there have been any changes in the Government's priorities as chairman of the Western European Union.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Her Majesty's Government established four main priorities at the outset of our Presidency of the Western European Union:

- —to elaborate on the commitments in the WEU platform on European security interests in order to make further practical contributions to the common defence;
- —to use the WEU as a forum for frank discussion of key European security issues;
- —to develop the WEU as a forum for co-ordinating European approaches to out of area issues;
- —to secure a satisfactory outcome to the enlargement negotiations with Spain and Portugal.

These objectives have not changed. The last of them was achieved with signature on 14 November of a protocol for the accession of Spain and Portugal to the modified Brussels treaty.

116. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on recent developments in the Western European Union.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friends the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence jointly hosted the ministerial council meeting of the WEU in London on 14 November. The major event of this occasion was signature of a protocol for the accession of Spain and Portugal to the modified Brussels treaty. This was one of the main priorities for our Presidency, and its early achievement is gratifying.

Other business included a report on the implementation of the platform on European security agreed at The Hague in October 1987, and a report on progress made in fulfilling the mandate on arms control and defence requirements, given by Ministers at their meeting in The Hague in April 1988. The meeting also noted with approval the success of the joint mine-sweeping operation in the Gulf as a concrete example of the work that the WEU is doing in the defence co-operation field.

Tanks

80. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning future orders for supply of tanks to Her Majesty's forces.

103. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for the replacement of the Chieftain tank.

107. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for the replacement of the Chieftain tank.

109. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the first prototype of the Challenger II to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

110. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the plans for the replacement of the Chieftain tank.

Mr. Sainsbury: I would refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave yesterday to the hon. Member for New Forest (Mr. McNair-Wilson).

Army Trucks

81. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of the tenders submitted by Leyland DAF and Bedford to supply a new generation of trucks for the Army.

Mr. Sainsbury: Evaluation trials of vehicles to meet the Department's future requirements for 4-tonne trucks were recently completed. Vehicles were provided by AWD Ltd.

(formerly Bedford Trucks), Leyland DAF and Volvo (GB) Ltd. Commercial proposals were received from the three companies in October and these together with the trials data are now subject to detailed examination and assessment. We expect to be in a position to announce the winner of the competition by mid-1989.

Widows (Pensions)

83. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the arrangements for awarding pensions to war widows and widows of service men.

Mr. Freeman: The arrangements for awarding pensions under the armed forces pension scheme are kept under periodic review. War widows' pensions are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Warsaw Pact (Forces)

85. **Mr. Whitney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on recent measures the Warsaw pact has taken to modernise its nuclear and conventional forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The most recent and comprehensive account of the modernisation of the Warsaw pact's conventional and nuclear forces can be found in chapter six of this year's statement on the Defence Estimates (Cm. 344-I). As the statement makes clear, there has been no let-up in the Soviet Union's military modernisation programmes, despite improvements in East-West relations.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on measures the Warsaw pact is taking to modernise its nuclear and conventional forces.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has as to measures the Warsaw pact is taking to modernise its nuclear and conventional forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The most recent and comprehensive account of the modernisation of the Warsaw pact's conventional and nuclear forces can be found in chapter 6 of this year's "Statement on the Defence Estimates" (Cm. 344-I). As the statement makes clear, there has been no let up in the Soviet Union's military modernisation programmes, despite improvements in East-West relations.

United States Defence Secretary

86. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the United States Secretary for Defence; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend last met the United States Secretary for Defence at the nuclear planning group on 26 and 27 October. They discussed a range of matters of mutual interest.

Saudi Arabian Defence Minister

91. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the Saudi Arabian Defence Minister; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence last met the Saudi Arabian Defence Minister earlier this month. A wide range of defence issues of mutual interest were discussed including project Al Yamamah which covers the supply of United Kingdom defence equipment to Saudi Arabia.

Defence Materials (Supply)

92. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for the supply of defence materials of *(a)* the current and *(b)* planned regional distribution of production of defence materials by former Royal Ordnance plants; and if he will make a statement.

93. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for the supply of defence materials of *(a)* the current and *(b)* planned regional distribution of production of defence materials by former Royal Ordnance plants; and if he will make a statement.

125. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for the supply of defence materials of *(a)* the current and *(b)* planned regional distribution of production of defence materials by former Royal Ordnance plants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Members to the answer that I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham).

Military Hospitals

95. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what liaison arrangements exist in respect of military hospitals.

Mr. Freeman: Liaison is maintained at varying levels. First, between the local GPs and civilian and military hospitals, and between the military hospitals and area health authorities. Higher level liaison takes place between the Defence medical services and the regional health authorities and the Department of Health.

Defence Budget

96. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on any changes he proposes in the defence budget.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As last year, substantial increases to previous plans for defence expenditure were announced in the autumn statement. These increases mean that the defence budget will now be growing by about a billion pounds a year for the next three years.

Reserve and Volunteer Forces

98. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether the efficiency and effectiveness of the regular reserve and volunteer forces have improved since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: I can assure the hon. Member that both the regular reserve and volunteer forces are today at a considerably higher standard of efficiency and effectiveness than they were in 1979. Numbers of personnel, their equipment, training and administration have all shown a significant improvement.

Seaborne Nuclear Defence

99. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review Britain's seaborne nuclear defence capability in light of the intermediate nuclear forces treaty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None. The modernisation of the United Kingdom's strategic nuclear deterrent with Trident is proceeding on schedule. We are also continuing to study options for the updating of our sub-strategic deterrent forces in light of the fact that the weapons which currently provide this capability are likely to reach the end of their service life towards the end of the century.

Conventional Forces

101. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the balance of conventional forces in Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary on 25 November, at column 38, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has recently published an assessment of the strengths of the conventional armed forces in Europe belonging to the countries of NATO and the Warsaw pact. A copy of the assessment, entitled "Conventional Forces in Europe: the Facts", will be placed in the Library of the House. The data provided confirms the major superiorities enjoyed by the Warsaw pact in those weapon systems such as tanks and artillery which are relevant to an offensive capability; the elimination of these asymmetries, through reductions, will be a major Alliance aim in the forthcoming arms control negotiations on conventional forces in the Atlantic to Urals area. We hope that the publication of the assessment will encourage the Warsaw pact to be equally open about information on conventional force levels.

BAe 146

102. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on purchases of the BAe 146.

Mr. Sainsbury: Two BAe 146s were purchased for the Queen's Flight in 1986.

Nuclear Weapons (Upgrading)

104. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his policy of upgrading nuclear weapons includes increasing the number of warheads per missile.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to paragraphs 1 and 2 of Defence open Government document 87/01 "Trident and the Alternatives", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Surplus Land

106. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will report progress on disposing of land surplus to his Department's requirements.

Mr. Freeman: The Ministry of Defence continues to keep its estate under review to identify and dispose of land which is surplus to Defence requirements. At present we are concentrating in particular on the disposal of high value land where this is conductive to efficiency and operational needs and we have a number of high value disposals underway in areas such as north-west London. Receipts from land and property sales in financial years 1987-88 totalled £77 million and the current estimate for receipts in 1988-89 is £148 million.

Nuclear Weapons (Production)

112. **Ms. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to ensure that the production of material for nuclear weapons is being carried out safely; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Nuclear materials for defence purposes are procured commercially; and it is the responsibility of the individual contractor to meet the high standards of safety required by the relevant legislation and monitored by the appropriate regulatory bodies.

British Army of the Rhine

115. **Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent measures have been taken to strengthen the air mobility capability of the British Army of the Rhine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following the successful conclusion of airmobility trials involving 6 Brigade in Germany, 24 Brigade converted to the airmobile role in April of this year. In addition to the Royal Air Force Puma and Chinook helicopters, which continue to be provided in support of airmobility, a new Army Air Corps Regiment, consisting of anti-tank and utility Lynx and Gazelle helicopters, will be formed as part of 24 Brigade. This represents a significant improvement in the airmobility capability of 1(BR) Corps.

Defence Computer Systems

117. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to strengthen the security of sensitive defence computer systems.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling).

Devonport Dockyard

119. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to increase his Department's allocation of naval work to Her Majesty's dockyard, Devonport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The programme of MOD work allocated to Devonport Royal dockyard is kept under regular review and changes to future load are advised periodically to the commercial managers. In addition DML may bid for work in the unallocated programme.

Short-range Nuclear Weapons

121. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he anticipates next meeting the Defence Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany to discuss the deployment of short-range nuclear weapons within Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Defence, next expects to meet his colleague, the Federal German Defence Minister, at the Eurogroup and Defence Planning Committee ministerial meetings which are due to take place in Brussels between 30 November and 2 December. The two Ministers are likely to discuss a wide range of defence and security matters of mutual interest.

Tanks and Helicopters

122. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the likely level of investment in *(a)* tanks and *(b)* Army helicopters over the next five years.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is not the practice of this or previous Administrations to provide details of future levels of investment in equipment. However, both the helicopter and the tank have an essential role on the modern and future battlefield, and expenditure on both will be substantial.

Gurkha Regiment

126. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the future of the Gurkha regiment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No formal representations have been received, although a number of letters have been received from members of the public.

Plessey (Takeover)

129. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the implications for procurement in defence electronics of the proposed GEC takeover of Plessey.

Mr. Sainsbury: We are considering the defence implications of the GEC/Siemens bid for Plessey.

German Minister of Defence

130. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his counterpart in the Federal Republic of Germany; and what issues were discussed.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend last met Dr. Scholz at the meeting of the WEU Defence and Foreign Ministers on 14 November, but their most recent bilateral meeting was on 4 October when a range of subjects of mutual interest were discussed.

East-West Talks

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of East-West talks in respect of conventional forces in Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Talks are continuing in Vienna on mandates for two sets of conventional arms control negotiations: one on conventional stability in Europe, the other on confidence and security-building measures, building from those agreed in the Stockholm document of 1986. It is hoped that both negotiations can begin in the near future. In the meantime, the existing mutual and balanced force reduction talks, concerning forces in Central Europe, are also continuing in Vienna.

Territorial Army (Recruiting)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what he is doing to improve recruiting within the Territorial Army.

Mr. Freeman: We are conscious that the demographic trends show that the population in the age group from which we draw most recruits to the TA is decreasing. We have, therefore, in addition to our advertising, introduced a number of measures such as relaxation of age limits, reduction of commitment in particular problem specialisations and both pay and bounties have been increased. We are also hopeful that our current advertising campaign aimed at employers, although not aimed at recruiting, will have some useful benefits in this direction.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many new recruits have been enlisted in each of the services in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The information is shown below:

Service	*83-84*	*84-85*	*85-86*	*86-87*	*87-88*
RN/RM	5,232	5,536	5,369	6,569	6,172
Army	22,348	22,278	20,268	19,918	21,041
RAF	9,411	6,907	7,014	7,562	6,613

Mine-hunting Trials

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to resume hovercraft mine-hunting trials.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave the hon. Gentleman on 10 November at column *302.*

HMS Endurance

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to be in a position to place an order for the replacement of HMS Endurance.

Mr. Sainsbury: There is no need to take a decision yet on the replacement of HMS Endurance. She underwent an extensive refit in 1986 which will give her an economic life extending into the mid-90s. Our plans beyond then will be kept under review in the light of developments in the Antarctic.

Westland Helicopters

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his discussions with Westland plc on the procurement of helicopters.

Mr. Sainsbury: As is the normal practice with all defence contractors, the Department maintains close contact with Westland on the MOD projects on which the company is working.

British-French Co-ordination

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement of his policy on British-French defence co-ordination.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We already enjoy an extensive defence relationship with France and, as reported in paragraph 117 of the 1988 "Statement on the Defence Estimates" (Cm. 344-I), we are discussing a number of ideas for even closer bilateral co-operation.

Maritime Defence

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the contribution of the Royal Navy to the maritime defence of the Atlantic Alliance.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to paragraph 302 of volume 1 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1988" (Cm. 344-I).

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the anticipated cost of the decommissioning of British nuclear submarines.

Mr. Sainsbury: No decision has yet been taken on the method of disposing of decommissioned nuclear submarines; therefore no costs have yet been assessed.

Defence Contracts (North-west)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the progress of defence contracts currently being undertaken in the north-west.

Mr. Sainsbury: There are a large number of defence contractors based in the north-west, and a still greater number of projects being undertaken there. It is, therefore, not possible to provide the information requested without disproportionate effort. However, some 10 per cent. of defence expenditure is made in the region.

Teachers

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what percentage of teachers employed on British bases in Germany are locally entered teachers; and what have been the comparable figures each year since 1982;

(2) what percentage of teachers employed on British bases in Germany are locally entered teachers.

Mr. Sainsbury: Approximately 25 per cent. of teachers working in the service children's schools in Germany at present are locally entered teachers. In previous years, the annual percentages were as follows:

	Per cent.
1982	24
1983	25
1984	22
1985	21
1986	22
1987	25

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many locally entered teachers were scale 1 teachers, scale 2 teachers, scale 3 teachers and scale 4 teachers in 1982; and what have been the figures each year to the latest available date;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table setting out the pay of locally entered teachers and United Kingdom-based main scale for each year from 1982 to the latest available date.

Mr. Sainsbury: The information requested on all locally entered teachers around the world is not held centrally and can only be obtained at disproportionate costs.

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if locally entered teachers are entitled to paid leave for participation in trade union activities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: There are no formal union recognition arrangements covering locally entered teachers. The question of granting accredited representatives paid leave for participation in trade union activities does not, therefore, arise.

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the pay and conditions of locally entered teachers employed in Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The pay of all locally entered staff in Germany is currently under review. Conditions of employment are regularly reviewed.

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning the pay and conditions of locally entered teachers employed in Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: There has been a small number of representations to local management about the level of locally entered teacher pay awards in Germany.

Sherwood Forest

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what acreage of Sherwood forest has been used by his Department for each of the years since 1979; whether he has any plans to reduce this acreage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* The Ministry of Defence has used the following acreages of land in Sherwood forest for Army training purposes since 1979:

	Acres
1979-1981	720
1982-1987	669
1988	602

Included within the 602 acres is a 28-acre pine forest in Budby south forest which the Army has agreed no longer to use for training. We plan to lease a further 482 acres of land in the Sherwood forest area for training purposes; we expect negotiations to be concluded shortly.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 30 November 1988

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply of Tuesday 29 November at column 178. My Department has no plans to seek removal of Crown immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations.

Nursery Schooling and Child Care

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the Government will respond formally to the report by Bronwen Cohen for the Equal Opportunities Commission, which forms part of the European Commission's study on the provision of nursery schooling and childcare.

Mrs. Rumbold: As the report was prepared for the European Commission the Government have no plans to make a formal response. The report's findings will be taken into account by a number of Government Departments, particularly in the context of the ministerial group on women's issues in its consideration of childcare needs.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of those convicted of crimes in Northern Ireland in 1987 have ever been admitted to National Health Service mental illness hospitals and units with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses.

Mr. Ian Stewart: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave him on 28 November 1988 at column *121*.

School Meals

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average price charged to pupils for school meals by each education and library board in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

1988-89 school year

Education and library board	*Primary pence*	*Secondary pence*
Belfast	75	75
South Eastern	80	85
Southern	75	80
Western	80	85
North Eastern	75	[1]

[1] The North Eastern education and library board operates cash cafeterias in all its secondary schools. Other boards operate cash cafeterias in a number of their secondary schools.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether, in view of the over-capacity in slaughterhouse facilities in Northern Ireland, he will set out the justification for grant aid for the further provision of slaughtering facilities from Her Majesty's Government or European Economic Community sources.

Mr. Viggers: Investment relating to an increase in beef and pigmeat slaughtering capacity in Northern Ireland is ineligible for consideration for assistance from Her Majesty's Government or the European Community unless it relates to the modernisation, rationalisation or replacement of existing capacity.

Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many claims have been received in the past 12 months arising from damage to vehicles in the grounds of the Royal Victoria hospital, Belfast.

Mr. Ian Stewart: During the 12 months ended 25 November 1988, 10 claims for criminal damage compensation were received for vehicles damaged in the grounds of the hospital.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the allocation to individual programmes in Northern Ireland of the public expenditure totals announced on 1 November.

Mr. Tom King: The autumn statement by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on 1 November announced total public expenditure planning figures for the Northern Ireland programme as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1989-90	5,468
1990-91	5,690
1991-92	5,910

Excluding social security benefits and national agriculture and fishery support, the allocation for 1989-90 represents an increase of some £219 million or 6 per cent. on the forecast out-turn for 1988-89. However when account is taken of resources released through a reduction in the NI Housing Executive's outstanding debt, the cash available for services in 1989-90 will be 7·4 per cent. higher than in 1988-89.

I have decided on the following allocations to individual programmes:

Programme	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Northern Ireland Office:			
Law, Order, Protective and Miscellaneous Services	627	670	710

Programme	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Northern Ireland Departments:			
Northern Ireland Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Services and Support	111	110	110
Industry, Trade and Employment	426	430	430
Energy	−50	−50	−80
Transport	157	160	160
Housing	257	240	250
Environmental and Miscellaneous Services	284	300	300
Law, Order and Protective Services (Fire Service)	29	30	30
Education and Science, Arts and Libraries	930	960	1,000
Health and Personal Social Services	940	980	1,020
Social Security Administration	103	110	110
Other Public Services	63	60	70
Total Northern Ireland Block (excluding Social Security Benefits)	3,880	4,000	4,120
Social Security Benefits	1,514	1,630	1,730
Total Northern Ireland Block	5,394	5,620	5,840
National Agriculture and Fishery Support	74	70	70
Total Northern Ireland Programme	5,468	5,690	5,910

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £1 million for 1989-90 and to the nearest £10 million for 1990-91 and 1991-92. Figures may not sum to totals because of roundings.
2. The figures for the energy programme are negative because it is anticipated that in the years concerned NIE will be repaying loans to Government.
3. The plans for the housing programme reflect the intention to reduce Northern Ireland Housing Executive's outstanding debt, subject to parliamentary approval of a forthcoming financial provisions order.

The planning figures for 1989-90 will form the basis for preparation by Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office of main estimates for the coming year. These will be presented to Parliament in due course.

The allocations reflect my assessment of how best to distribute the Northern Ireland public expenditure totals in response to local needs and circumstances. Copies of a more detailed statement on these allocations have been placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Lobster Stocks

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to extend the seeding of lobster stocks.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My Department and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland have been closely involved in a series of lobster stock enhancement programmes in inshore waters in which tagged, hatchery-reared lobsters have been released and later recaptured in commercial fisheries. The initial results of these experiments are ecouraging. However, these studies will need to run for at least three years before firm conclusions can be reached or decisions taken on the value of extending this work.

Research and Development Budget

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the cuts in the research and development budget.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the cuts in the research and development budget.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning public funding for research in horticulture.

Mr. Ryder: Following discussions with Ministers and officials, industry organisations were asked for their considered responses by the end of October to our proposals for withdrawal of Government funding for near market R and D. So far, about 60 have been received, together with correspondence from other organisations and individuals.

Warble Fly

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will amend the existing regulations to limit the areas where it is necessary to treat cattle against warble fly.

Mr. Donald Thompson: No infected areas requiring compulsory treatment for warble fly were declared in either 1987 or 1988. Where, however, a clinical case of warble fly is identified, the relevant herd owner and those within a 3 km radius are required to treat their cattle.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the countries in which there has been no incidence of warble fly being reported for the last three years.

Mr. Donald Thompson: In the years 1986 to 1988 (up to 25 November 1988) there have been no reports of warble fly in the following counties of Great Britain:

Bedford
Berkshire
Borders
Buckinghamshire
Cambridgeshire
Central
Cheshire
Cleveland
Clwyd
Cumbria
Dumfries and Galloway
Durham
Dyfed
East Sussex
Essex
Fife
Gloucestershire
Grampian
Greater London
Greater Manchester
Gwent
Gwynedd
Hampshire
Hertfordshire
Highland
Humberside
Isle of Wight
Isles of Scilly
Lancashire

Leicestershire
Lincolnshire
Lothian
Merseyside
Mid Glamorgan
Norfolk
North Yorkshire
Northumberland
Nottinghamshire
Oxford
Powys
Shetland and Orkney
Shropshire
South Glamorgan
South Yorkshire
Staffordshire
Strathclyde
Suffolk
Surrey
Tayside
Tyne and Wear
Warwickshire
West Midlands
West Yorkshire

Butter

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost to the European Economic Community for export restitution and other costs for the export of butter for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Expenditure by the European Community on exports of butter and butter oil in 1987 was 758 million ecu (£545 million).

Food Firms

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will estimate the number of food-exporting firms who are still awaiting refunds under the European Community's common agricultural policy; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if his Department will be paying compensation to those food-exporting firms who are still awaiting refunds under the European Community's common agricultural policy; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will make a statement on the delay in payment of refunds to United Kingdom food manufacturers and exporters; how many firms were affected; and if a computer system was responsible.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I share my hon. Friend's concern at the continuation of some delays in the payment of export refunds, which are largely the result of technical problems earlier this year with the development of software for the Intervention Board's computerised external claims system. The Intervention Board continues to do everything possible to restore the position on all claims. Considerable progress has been made, and around 70 per cent. of all claims by value are being paid within two months. Compensation payments will be made under the scheme announced in July on all claims paid since 1 January 1988 after more than two months. Records are not kept of the number of companies whose claims are delayed but, in general, they currently fall within the pigmeat, processed goods and ships stores sectors. Further headway is however being made in these areas, and payment times should progressively improve.

Sellafield

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will seek to obtain from the French Commissariat a L'Energie Atomique the report recently made public that asserts the sea off Sellafield is more radioactive than the sea near to the French Mururoa nuclear test site; and if he will initiate an investigation into these claims.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My Department has a copy of the document prepared by the French Atomic Energy Commission. We understand that the French authorities did not intend to compare the situation at Sellafield unfavourably with that near their test site, and that they agree that there is no foundation for any speculation that the sea off Sellafield presents any risk to the public. Intensive monitoring carried out by my Department shows clearly that marine radioactivity levels resulting from liquid discharges from Sellafield in 1987 were only about one-hundredth of the level during the 1970s and are continuing to be reduced. The radiation dose even to those consumers who eat large quantities of local fish and shellfish remains well within internationally recommended limits.

Honey (Safety)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if any evaluation has been made of the problem of selling honey found to contain 985 bequerels per kilogram from Chernobyl fall-out, as announced by his Department on 19 August; and what studies have been made of the safety of such honey for human consumption.

Mr. Ryder: No problems arise over the levels of caesium detected in honey. The advice of the National Radiological Protection Board is that, even assuming consumption well above the average, the levels reported are far below those at which action to protect the consumer would need to be considered.

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mr. Ryder: I refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply on Tuesday 29 November. My Department has no plans to seek removal of Crown immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations.

EC Sheepmeat Regime

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to protect the interests of United Kingdom sheep hill farmers during the current negotiations to reform the European Community sheepmeat regime.

Mr. Donald Thompson: In the review of the sheepmeat regime I shall be seeking to secure arrangements which allow United Kingdom producers, including those in the hills, to continue to capitalise on their superior efficiency and natural advantages.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Minister of Africulture, Fisheries and Food whether he proposes to take any further steps to deal with bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. MacGregor: Sir Richard Southwood's working party, in a second interim report, has made two recommendations on which I have decided to act straightaway. First, the report has indicated that it is not at present possible to be wholly sure that rendering as currently practised would eliminate the bovine spongiform encephalopathy agent. I therefore propose to extend by one year, that is until 31 December 1989, the current prohibition on the use of certain animal protein in feed for ruminants. I would like to make it clear that the prohibition would have to continue there after unless processing methods which are sufficient to destroy the casual agent have been identified and are widely available.

Second, the working party has also advised that although in its view the transmission of bovine spongiform encephalopathy via milk is very unlikely, it would be prudent to ensure that milk from animals suspected of having bovine spongiform encephalopathy is destroyed. In fact, little or no milk is produced from such animals. As a precautionary measure, however, I shall be making an order prohibiting the sale or use of such milk for human or animal consumption except for the feeding of the cow's own calf.

WALES

Planning Law

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to change the law which allows a developer to dig a short trench which by doing so satisfies the definition of a specified activity and thereby enables that developer artificially to preserve a planning consent without undertaking any real development on the site.

Mr. Grist: None.

Council Housing (Rents)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the average rent of a three-bedroomed council house within each Welsh housing authority in each year since 1979-80.

Mr. Grist: The information requested on the average rent of a three-bedroomed council house is not collected centrally. Such information is published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in "Housing Rent Statistics".

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mr. Grist: I refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply of Tuesday 29 November at column *178*. The Department has no plans to seek removal of Crown Immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations.

Midwives

Sir Raymond Gower: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many nursing and midwifery staff from each of the old grades have been assimilated to each of the new grades in the clinical grading structure.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information requested is given in the following table:

The new clinical grading structure for nursing, midwifery and health visitor staff—movement from old grades to new grades
November 1988—Wales

Title	*Old Pay Code*	*WTE Staff in post at 31 Nov. 88*	*Movement to New Grades*								
			A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*
			Per cent.	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*
Nursing Auxiliary	NB01/11	6,888·70	86·7	13·2	0·10						
Hospital Staff (NNEB)	NB21	133·92	0·4	82·0	17·00						
Enrolled Nurse[1]	NB31	5064·16			30·13	58·1	11·6	0·08	0·04		
Enrolled Dist. Train.[1]	NB31	264·20				81·5	18·5				
Senior Enrolled[1]	NB61	252·92			0·20	16·3	83·1	0·40			
Staff Nurse[1]	NB41/51/61	5,088·29				17·9	71·7	10·10	0·20	0·1	
Staff Midwife[1]	NB61	515·75				10·3	39·0	49·70	1·00		
Deputy Sister[1]	NB71	148·90					5·5	93·80	0·70		
Sister II[1]	NB81/91	2,762·52					0·1	34·40	62·90	2·5	0·1
Sister II Midwife[1]	NB91	699·04						8·40	86·70	4·9	
District Nurse Sister II[1]	NB91	722·66						1·00	95·60	3·4	
Sister I	NC01	82·93						7·20	36·10	44·6	12·1
Sister I Midwife	NC01	3·00							66·70	33·3	
Health Visitor	NX01	602·01							95·50	4·5	
Senior Nurse 8	NI01	236·24							13·60	43·0	43·4
Senior Nurse 6 Midwife	NI01	37·00								56·8	43·2
Senior Nurse 7	NI06	274·48								12·8	87·2
Senior Nurse 7 Midwife	NI06	26·50								15·1	84·9
Clinical Teacher	NW01	55·00								82·7	17·3
Fieldwork Teacher	NW01	72·00							1·40	97·2	1·4
Practical Work Teacher	NB91	89·00								100·0	
Tutor	NW11	192·72							2·10	2·6	95·3

Title	Old Pay Code	WTE Staff in post at 31 Nov. 88	Movement to New Grades								
			A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*
			Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.
Tutor Midwife	NW11	26·93							3·70	29·0	67·3
Post basic students Enrolled	NB31	106·80			83·30	14·8	1·9				
Post basic students Staff Nurse	NB61	286·51			2·10	75·5	18·6	3·80			
Post basic students Dep. Sister	NB71	—									
Post basic students Sister II	NB91	16·00						62·50	31·30	6·2	
Others	NO00	137·71	7·0	3·2	10·10	22·0	18·5	13·30	12·80	7·3	5·8
	Totals	24,787·00	24·0	4·0	7·00	18·0	19·0	8·00	15·00	2·0	3·0

[1] Exclude Post Basic Students.

HOME DEPARTMENT

British Dependencies

115. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what diferences there are in the regulations relating to admission to the United Kingdom for health treatment from the British dependencies in *(a)* the Caribbean and *(b)* Gibraltar and the Falklands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: British citizens resident in any of the dependent territories are not subject to immigration control, whatever the purpose for which they wish to come to the United Kingdom. The admission of passengers requiring leave to enter is governed by the immigration rules, which provide for the admission of passengers from any country who wish to receive private medical treatment at their own expense. Separate arrangements also exist by which the medical authorities of a number of countries, including Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands, may refer patients for free treatment in the United Kingdom under the National Health Service.

Fines (Non-payment)

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average amount owing by people imprisoned for non-payment of fines, in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is not available centrally.

Cell Toilets

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the policy of his Department on the installation of cell toilets in prison wings when wings are being rebuilt or redeveloped; and if he will list the prisons in which this has been done.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Prison department policy is to install in-cell sanitation when prison wings are being rebuilt or redeveloped. Major refurbishment schemes of this type have begun at Liverpool and Stafford prisons.

Women's Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the creche facilities at each of the women's prisons in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on such facilities.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None of these prisons has creches. But they exist, staffed by volunteers, at a number of male establishments. The Department is encouraging governors of establishments without such facilities to set them up wherever possible.

Police (Leicestershire)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now approve the request of the chief constable of Leicestershire for more police officers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The police authority wrote on 8 September notifying us of a revised application for 89 police posts subject to the county council's decision on the availability of finance. This will be considered along with applications which have been received from other authorities for increases in 1989-90.

My right hon. Friend is able to approve 800 police posts for provincial forces in 1989-90. This is an increase on the 500 which were available for this financial year. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary will offer advice on how the available posts should be allocated. The aim is to announce decisions in December.

Fire Safety

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to improve the standards of fire safety in newly-constructed private dwelling houses; and if he has any plans to give the fire service authority to intervene in matters relating to newly-constructed private dwelling houses.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: All new buildings have to meet the requirements of part B of the Building Regulations 1984 relating to structural aspects of fire safety. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is currently undertaking a review of all building regulation requirements and a consultation paper will be issued when the part of the review concerning fire is completed. I do not have plans to give the fire service authority in these matters, for which responsibility rests with building control authorities.

Immigration

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of letters received but not opened at Lunar house on 21 November.

Mr. Renton: On 21 November, the approximate total number of unopened items of mail and those opened for the extraction of fees but not acknowledged was 591. All mail received in the post room is now being opened and acknowledged within 24 hours.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the date of receipt of applications for the citizenship being dealt with by Lunar house on 21 November.

Mr. Renton: Information is not available in the form requested. The average time since the date of application for cases completed by the nationality division (including the Liverpool nationality office) during October 1988 was 13 months for registration and 21 months for naturalisations.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for *(a)* citizenship and *(b)* variations of leave have been received; and how many applications have been (i) granted and (ii) not granted in each case, in each of the last two years.

Mr. Renton: Information on applications for citizenship and variation of limited leave to stay and how they are dealt with is published in the annual report "Immigration, Nationality and Passports". Information on applications made, and decisions taken, in 1986 and 1987 for these two types of cases is given in the following two tables:

(a) British citizenship

	1986	*1987*
Number of applications received in caseworking groups	57,480	[1]80,020
Number of grants of British citizenship[2]	45,870	64,880
Number of applications not granted	4,900	5,690

Notes:

[1] This figure does not include some 210,000 applications which had been received by the end of 1987 but had not then been sorted and prepared for consideration.

[2] These figures for grants of British citizenship were published in Home Office statistical bulletin "Citizenship Statistics, United Kingdom 1987" (Issue 12/88).

(b) Variations of limited leave to stay in the United Kingdom, excluding EC nationals[3]

	1986	*1987*
Number of applications received (by post or in Public Enquiry Offices)	261,280	230,470
Number of grants of extensions of stay or settlement	214,270	197,510
Number of refusals of extension or settlement	9,280	9,130

Note:

[3] This table does not include figures for applications which were withdrawn, or which for other reasons did not require a decision.

Asylum

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people applied for asylum in the United Kingdom in each month of 1988 to October; how many were *(a)* refused and *(b)* granted; and how many were (i) detained and (ii) removed.

Mr. Renton: Information for the first two quarters of 1988 is given in table 1. Information on the number of asylum applicants detained is not collected in the form requested. However, table 2 gives the number of asylum applicants at ports who, on the first day of the month indicated, had been detained for more than one month. Comprehensive information on the numbers of asylum applicants removed is not available centrally.

Table 1: Applications for asylums received and decided[1]

Number of persons

	January to March 1988	*April to June 1988*
Applications received	913	553
Decisions		
Granted refugee status	105	138
Refused asylum but granted leave to remain on exceptional grounds	200	339
Refused asylum	137	126
Applications withdrawn	90	111

[1] Provisional: likely be revised upwards.

Table 2: Number of asylums applications at ports detained for more than one month

Number of persons on first day of month

1988	*Number*
January	43
February	50
March	51
April	41
May	55
June	40
July	21
August	20
September	23
October	20
November	25

Visitors (Entry Refusals)

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the number of refusals of visitors at United Kingdom ports of entry in 1985, 1986 and for the first 10 months of 1988, showing the figure as a percentage by the number of visitor applications made.

Mr. Renton: The available information on the numbers of passengers admitted into the United Kingdom and on those who were refused leave to enter and removed in 1985, 1986 and 1987 are published annually in table 1 of the annual Command Paper "Control of Immigration Statistics, United Kingdom" (Cm. 9863, 166 and 415 respectively). Although the numbers of visitors admitted are known, it is not possible to distinguish from the refused and removed figures those passengers who had sought entry as visitors.

In the first nine months of 1988, 13,743 non-EC passengers were refused leave to enter and removed. The corresponding admission figures are not yet available.

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply on Tuesday 29 November. The Home Department has no plans to seek removal of Crown immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations.

Car Phones

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been made against vehicle drivers for the use of car phones while driving a vehicle.

Mr. John Patten: The available information relates to proceedings at magistrates courts for all offences of careless driving etc., and is published annually in "Offences relating to motor vehicles, England and Wales, Supplementary tables" (table 5 of the issue for 1986, the latest available). The figures for 1987 will be published soon. Information is not collected centrally about the circumstances of these alleged offences.

PRIME MINISTER

Poland (Visit)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if during her recent visit to Poland she discussed with the Polish Government the possibility of the export of pollution abatement technology for rivers and waterways from the United Kingdom;

(2) if during her recent visit to Poland, she took the opportunity to raise with the Polish Government the possibility of Poland purchasing combined cycle clean coal-burning power station technology from the United Kingdom;

(3) if during her recent visit to Poland she discussed with the Polish Government the effect of the Chernobyl fall out on Polish agriculture; and if there were any lessons the United Kingdom could learn, in terms of environmental protection, from the Polish experience;

(4) if during her recent visit to Poland she raised the issue of Her Majesty's Government's concern over pollution released into the atmosphere from Polish power plants and factories contributing towards acid rain, ozone layer depletion and the greenhouse effect;

(5) if during her recent visit to Poland she discussed with officials and members of the Polish Government the possibilities of the United Kingdom exporting nuclear reactors, nuclear fuels and nuclear waste disposal technologies to Poland;

(6) if during her recent visit to Poland she discussed with Polish Government ministers progress made in nuclear, chemical and conventional arms control talks, in regard to the stabilisation of security in central Europe;

(7) if during her recent visit to Poland she discussed mutual methods of support of the non-proliferation treaty and the international nuclear safeguard regime.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) on 11 November 1988 at columns *315-16*.

Greenhouse Effect

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if, as part of her policy to develop a United Kingdom and European Community response to the greenhouse effect, she will seek to obtain, and set in train an expert evaluation of the Schmidbauer report on precautions for the protection of the earth's atmosphere released by the Bundestag in August.

The Prime Minister: All available relevant information will be taken into account in considering possible responses to the threat of global warming. The inter-governmental panel on climate change, under the auspices of UNEP and the WHO, has established three working groups to report on the science, effects and response to the greenhouse effect. The United Kingdom will be playing a major role in this key international forum, both leading the working group on scientific assessment and contributing to clarification of possible policy responses.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if she will initiate an interdepartmental evaluation of the total annual replacement numbers of incandescent light bulbs currently used by each Government Department, Government agencies, quangos, local government departments and educational establishments in the United Kingdom, as part of her recent policy announcement to counter the greenhouse effect; and if she will further initiate a cost comparison between replacement with compact fluorescent energy efficient bulbs and those incandescent bulbs currently in use.

The Prime Minister: No. It is already Government policy to use the most cost effective and energy efficient form of lighting appropriate to the circumstances.

Arms Control

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if during her recent visit to Washington and meeting with President Reagan and President-elect Bush, she discussed developments since the December 1984 memorandum of understanding of the strategic defence initiative and the anti-ballistic missile treaty on *(a)* arms control verification for space weapons, *(b)* the recent United States-Union of Soviet Socialist Republics joint review of the anti-ballistic missile treaty, *(c)* future contract possibilities in the United Kingdom for strategic defence initiative research and development and *(d)* the continued implications for the strategic defence programme of the agreements at the 1986 Reykjavik summit and the treaty of Washington in 1987 on intermediate range nuclear forces and other arms control issues.

The Prime Minister: No.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans in her forthcoming meeting with President Gorbachev to put forward new initiatives to convert the 1963 partial test ban treaty into a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

The Prime Minister: No. For the foreseeable future United Kingdom security will depend on deterrence based in part on possession of nuclear weapons; this will mean a continuing requirement to test them to ensure that they remain effective and up-to-date. A comprehensive nuclear test ban remains a long term goal but progress will only be made by a step-by-step approach which must take account of technical advances in verification as well as progress elsewhere in arms control and the attitude of other states.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if in her forthcoming meeting with President Gorbachev she will make it her policy to attempt to secure common agreement on a joint United Kingdom-Union of Soviet Socialist Republics initiative on nuclear arms elimination under article 6 of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

The Prime Minister: No.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if during her recent visit to Washington DC and meeting with President Reagan and President-elect Bush, she put forward any new arms control and disarmament initiatives in the field of verification measures for a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

The Prime Minister: No.

TRANSPORT

Dangerous Substances

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will bring forward proposals to strengthen the existing regulations regarding the transportation of dangerous and toxic materials by road; and if he will take steps to see that the existing regulations are properly enforced.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Proposals are made when necessary in the light of new developments and practical experience. The regulations are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive with the support of the police and the Department's traffic examiners.

Sewage Works (Perry Oaks)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the feasibility report on the possibility of moving the Thames Water sewage works from Perry Oaks to an alternative site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A report commissioned jointly by the then British airports authority and the Thames water authority on the feasibility of releasing the Perry Oaks sludge works site was completed in July 1986, and a copy deposited in the Library. I understand that the further technical trials recommended by the report, to determine the optimum method of releasing the site, are now complete and that BAA plc and the Thames water authority are discussing its future.

Road Accidents

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, in the light of the report of the Royal College of Surgeons on deaths following road accidents, he will now consider further measures to eradicate congestion, increase facilities for offenders and encourage the transfer of traffic from road to rail.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is considering the issues raised by this independent report, which deals with fatal injury accidents in general, not just those from road accidents.

On alleviating road congestion, I would refer my hon. Friend to my reply of 28 November to his previous question on this issue at column *167*.

On the question of transferring traffic from road to rail I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply of 28 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) at column 162.

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply on Tuesday 29 November. This Department has no plans to seek removal of Crown immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Satellite Information Services Ltd.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has about equity shareholdings in Satellite Information Services Limited and about arrangements made for unallocated shares to be placed and the mechanism to be used for such placing.

Mr. Maude: Information has been given in connection with the company's application to be licensed under the Telecommunications Act 1984. Save for specified purposes section 101 of the Act precludes its disclosure in the absence of the company's consent. The most recent publicly available information is that contained in the company's public record held under the Companies Act 1985 at Companies house.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on United Kingdom manufacturing industries productivity since 1980 and that of major international competitors.

Mr. Maude: Since 1980 manufacturing productivity, as measured by output per head, has grown faster in the United Kingdom than in all other major industrialised countries. Over the previous two decades the United Kingdom was at the bottom of the league.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing in terms of 1988 prices the balance of trade in manufactures each year from 1958 and to the current year to date at an annualised rate, where possible less erratic items.

Mr. Alan Clark: Figures are only available at 1988 prices from 1970 onwards. The remaining figures requested are shown in the table below:

Manufactures less erratics (BOP basis) at 1988 prices (£ billion)

Period	*Exports*	*Imports*	*Balance*
1970	31·6	15·4	+16·2
1971	33·8	16·7	+17·2
1972	33·0	20·2	+12·9
1973	37·7	24·5	+13·1
1974	40·9	26·5	+14·4
1975	39·0	23·5	+15·5
1976	42·5	26·2	+16·3
1977	45·5	28·6	+16·0
1978	46·0	32·6	+13·3
1979	45·7	37·9	+7·7
1980	45·1	35·6	+9·5

Period	*Exports*	*Imports*	*Balance*
1981	43·9	37·5	+6·5
1982	44·1	41·6	+2·5
1983	43·5	47·0	−3·5
1984	47·9	52·4	−4·5
1985	51·5	54·9	−3·5
1986	52·0	58·3	−6·2
1987	56·1	64·2	−8·0
1988[1]	59·0	74·3	−15·3

[1] The figures for 1988 are for January-October 1988 at an annualised rate.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the percentage increase in the volume of imports of manufactures from and exports to the European Economic Community since 1970.

Mr. Alan Clark: Information on trade at constant prices is not available by area. Data at current prices are in the following table:

United Kingdom Trade in Manufactures with EC Countries[1]

£ billion
BoP Basis

	Exports	*Imports*
1970	2·2	1·5
12 months to September 1988	30·7	42·5

Note: [1] Present membership in both periods.
Source: Department of Trade and Industry.

Inward Investment

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the level of inward investment into the United Kingdom in 1987.

Mr. Alan Clark: According to the latest figures known to the invest in Britain bureau, in 1987, 323 inward investment decisions were made to locate in the United Kingdom. It is expected that these will create 21,279 jobs and safeguard a further 20,284. The associated capital investment is not known.

Scottish and Newcastle Breweries

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to receive the report from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the proposed take-over of Scottish and Newcastle Breweries.

Mr. Maude: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission is due to submit its report by 9 March 1989.

Single European Market

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on progress with regard to arrangements made by his Department to assist British firms to take full advantage of the completion of the internal market in 1992.

Mr. Alan Clark: Nine out of ten firms in this country are now aware of the significance of the single market. The central aim of DTI's Europe "Open for Business" campaign is to encourage firms throughout the country to examine the implications for their business and take action to prepare for the challenge.

Japan

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the current balance of trade in manufactured goods with Japan.

Mr. Alan Clark: The crude balance of trade in manufactured goods, defined as sections 5 to 8 of the standard international trade classification revision 3, with Japan based on the provisional figures for the nine months to September 1988 was £3,632·9 million in deficit.

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mr. Forth: I refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply on Tuesday 29 November at column *178*. My Department has no plans to seek removal of Crown immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations.

Takeovers

Mr. Stern: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to amend the regulations for reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in relation to projected takeovers by non United Kingdom resident companies.

Mr. Maude: No. The Government's policy on merger control was set out in our Blue Paper of 3 March following a review of mergers policy. The main consideration in deciding whether a merger should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission is the effect of the merger on competition. This applies to bids by foreign companies just as to bids by domestic companies.

Post Office Users Council

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he last met representatives of the Post Officer Users Council; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Forth: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs last met with the chairman of the Post Office Users' National Council on 2 November. This was one of a number of meetings which the Minister has had in recent months with representatives of the council to discuss Post Office matters.

EEC

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the internal market council held on 18 November.

Mr. Maude: The Council, at which I represented the United Kingdom, agreed six single market measures including three food law harmonisation directives relating to labelling, batch-marking and foods for particular nutritional uses; two directives to cut barriers to trade in pharmaceutical products; and a directive setting standards for the design and construction of side guards to be fitted to heavy goods vehicles. It also approved the EC/Switzerland agreement giving Community and Swiss non-life insurers reciprocal rights of establishment for branches and agencies within Switzerland and the Community. There was discussion of the proposal for an EC merger regulation during which I stressed the need for additional action to remove unfair barriers to takeovers which exist in some member states.

The Council also discussed proposed measures relating to the safety of machines, the official inspection of foodstuffs, patents and trademarks, broadcasting and the Commission's memorandum about proposals for a European company statute; and the Commission made a statement about progress in completing the single market.

SCOTLAND

Health Boards

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidance is given to health boards regarding performance-related pay schemes to general and unit managers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The guidance is contained in circular SHHD/DGM(1987)21, a copy of which will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Pacemakers

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in which units of Greater Glasgow health report there was the shortfall in pacemakers mentioned in the finance report 88/118(b) of Greater Glasgow health board; what was the initial shortfall; and what is the current figure.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for the health board. I understand that they have written to the hon. Gentleman asking him to substantiate comments made to the media.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the provisions allowing for the recovery of value added tax in circumstances where boards would otherwise be penalised financially for putting services out to tender.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Whitley Council Procedures (Appeals)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give the mean time taken for an appeal to be resolved by the Whitley council procedures;

(2) if he will give the number of appeals currently being processed by the Whitley council procedures.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The procedures for settling differences between employing authorities and individual NHS employees relating to conditions of service, including questions of grading, are prescribed in section 32 of the general Whitley council conditions of service handbook. The Scottish Home and Health Department has no role in these procedures, and no information of the kind sought by the hon. Member is held centrally.

NHS Ancillary Services (Privatisation)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the cost so far in redundancy and early retirement payments resulting from the privatisation of National Health Service ancillary services.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The first contracts to be awarded in the present round of competitive tendering for NHS ancillary services—which is not privatisation—are only now coming into effect. It is therefore too soon to give precise costs but eventual redundancy payments and premature retirement compensation costs resulting from this round are estimated to total £4 million and £800,000 respectively.

"The Scottish Health Service"

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the cost for printing and distributing the publication "The Scottish Health Service."

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The cost of printing was £28,740 or 47p per copy. Costs of handling and distribution of bulk supplies to health boards were £560.

Health

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the financial resources allocated to the National Health Service in Scotland for the care of the elderly and *(b)* the number of units and staff specifically allocated within the National Health Service in Scotland for the care of the elderly.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Financial resources allocated to health boards take account of a range of factors including the population in each board's area weighted to reflect age structure and, in particular, the number of elderly people, who require more intensive health care.

Most hospital and other NHS facilities provide services for a range of specialties. Throughout the NHS in Scotland there was an average of 10,997 staffed hospital beds in the year ending 30 September 1987 in the specialties of geriatric long-stay and geriatric assessment. At 30 September 1987 there were 204 hospital doctors in the NHS in Scotland within the specialty of geriatric medicine.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list *(a)* the number of people in Scotland between 65 and 75 years of age who have been identified as needing or having (i) hip replacements, (ii) cataracts, (iii) chest complaints, (iv) heart disease, (v) strokes, (vi) Parkinson's disease, (vii) Alzheimer's disease and (viii) osteo/rheumatoid arthritis, and *(b)* the number of people in Scotland over 75 years of age who have been identified as needing or having the above;

(2) if he will list *(a)* the number of 65 to 70-year-olds receiving private sector care, *(b)* the number of 70 to 75-year-olds receiving private sector care, *(c)* the number of 75 to 80-year-olds receiving private sector care, *(d)* the number of 80 to 85-year-olds receiving private sector care and *(e)* the number of people over 85 years of age receiving private sector care in Scotland;

(3) if he will list *(a)* the number of 65 to 70-year-olds receiving National Health Service care, *(b)* the number of 70 to 75-year-olds receiving National Health Service care,

(c) the number of 75 to 80-year-olds receiving National Health Service care, *(d)* the number of 80 to 85-year-olds receiving National Health Service care, and *(e)* the number of people over 85 years of age receiving National Health Service care in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is not held centrally.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has initiated any studies into the conclusions reached by Dr. Brenda Gibson and Dr. Tim Eden published in the *Lancet* on 9 September relating to childhood leukaemia in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The letter referred to reached no conclusions. It reported an observation that during 1987 more children than one would normally expect were diagnosed with leukaemia. The authors offered no likely explanation for this. Rates of child leukaemia vary considerably from year to year in the normal course of events. However, I shall be looking closely at the 1987 and the 1988 rates when they are available, in case they offer evidence of a rising trend.

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply on Tuesday 29 November. The Scottish Office has no plans to seek a general removal of Crown immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations. But it does not seek to alter the position whereby National Health Service premises, under the National Health Service (Amendment) Act 1986, automatically lose Crown immunity in respect of any matters which are the subject of regulations under the Health and Safety Act 1974.

Rating Reform

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assumptions he made, in calculating his estimates of community charge levels which local authorities might reasonably levy, in respect of each local authority in Scotland about provision to be made in 1989-90 for *(a)* inflation over 1988-89 budgets, *(b)* increased borrowing by authorities to finance capital expenditure under section 94 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, *(c)* full year commitments of expenditure incurred for only part of the year 1988-89, *(d)* loss of rate income in previous years due to revaluation appeals, *(e)* new services or expansion of existing services to meet demands created by demographic change, *(f)* any increased level of bad debt, *(g)* any proportion of the adult population which would avoid payment of the community charge and *(h)* the size of the adult population liable for payment of the community charge.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is as follows:

(i) 6 per cent.;

(ii) full account of the best available estimates of such borrowing less the reduction in borrowing which will result from the capitalisation of housing improvement and related specific grants;

(iii) none. The estimates specifically excluded increases in the volume of expenditure;

(iv) local authority's latest estimates of non-domestic rate income were used in the calculations;

(v) £35 million;

(vi) and (vii) It was assumed that losses in collection and exemptions (net of the additional income from standard charges) for community charges would together be at the same level as losses and reliefs for non-domestic rates;

(viii) 3,905,177 before exemptions or 3,806,571 taking account of exemptions and standard charges.

Blood Tests

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements have been made for the results of blood tests, including those involving DNA profiling, to be available for use in the Scottish courts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Questions have recently arisen in civil proceedings as to whether a court has power to order a person to submit to such tests or to draw an inference from a refusal to be tested. My noble and learned Friend, the Lord Advocate, has accordingly requested the Scottish Law Commission to consider questions arising from the provision of bodily samples of both civil and criminal cases and to report with their recommendations in the near future. I understand that the Commission intends to issue a discussion paper, with provisional proposals, on 8 December.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many current occupants of National Health Service hospital and unit beds have a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses in each health region; and what those figures are as a percentage of *(a)* mental and *(b)* all hospital beds in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* The information, which is provisional, is as follows:

Residents with main diagnosis of schizophrenic psychoses at end of 1987 by health board and expressed as percentage of psychiatric and all hospital beds

Health Board of Residence	*Total Number of Residents*	*Per cent. of psychiatric beds*	*Per cent. of all beds*
Argyll and Clyde	283	16·5	6·6
Ayrshire and Arran	132	14·3	4·5
Borders	37	11·5	3·9
Dumfries and Galloway	129	20·6	8·6
Fife	138	9·1	4·2
Forth Valley	273	14·2	8·0
Grampian	296	13·0	5·4
Greater Glasgow	866	18·3	6·9
Highland	135	15·2	6·2

Health Board of Residence	*Total Number of Residents*	*Per cent. of psychiatric beds*	*Per cent. of all beds*
Lanarkshire	273	13·4	5·4
Lothian	439	16·3	5·5
Orkney	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—
Tayside	330	16·2	6·5
Western Isles	—	—	—
TOTAL	3,331	15·3	6·0

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were discharged from mental illness hospitals in Scotland in the last year; and how many were admitted for a hospital stay more than once during the year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* Provisional figures indicate that 1,402 individual patients were discharged from mental illness hospitals in 1987 with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenic psychoses of whom 250 were readmitted at least once within the calendar year.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were discharged from mental illness hospitals in Scotland in each of the last five years; and how many of them were taken into local authority residential care in the same year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* The information is as follows:

Discharges[1] from mental illness hospitals with a main diagnosis of schizophrenic psychoses, 1982-87, showing discharges to local authority or hostel care

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*[2]1987*
Total discharges	2,500	2,633	2,566	2,698	2,518	2,452
Discharges to local authority or hostel care	71	75	81	93	108	115

[1] Includes discharges following readmissions.

[2] Provisional.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Attorney-General if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor's Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply of Tuesday 29 November at column *178*.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he has any plans to propose to the World Bank that all future funds from the International Development Association to the poorest countries be in the form of grants not loans;

(2) if he has any plans to propose to the governing bodies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund that, as part of their Third world debt policy, they include the six guidelines for structural adjustment programmes agreed by Ministers at the Development Assistance committee meeting in December 1987;

(3) if he will propose to the European Community that all aid loans, past, present and future, to the poorest countries now be converted into grants and all new aid be in the form of grants.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the answers that I gave the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes) on 28 November at columns *69-70*.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to increase the number of staff in the overseas development administration dealing with environmental and social aspects of aid.

Mr. Chris Patten: The number of social development advisers has increased from two to four over the last year and an associate professional has recently been appointed.

All project managers have responsibility for the environmental aspects of aid which must be addressed at the earliest stage of the project cycle. Environmental advice to the Department has recently been strengthened by a formal link with the International Institute for Environment and Development.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to restore Britain's overseas aid programme budget to its 1981 level of gross national product.

Mr. Chris Patten: Britain already has a substantial and effective aid programme of some £1,387 million in the current financial year. It is planned to grow significantly in real terms over the next three years.

Lomé Talks

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to ensure that the Lomé talks result in European Economic Community aid making provisions for more staff and resources for environmentally sustainable projects.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Community has already made clear the importance that it attaches to protecting the environment and has reaffirmed its willingness to step up co-operation with its African, Caribbean and Pacific partners in this area under the next Lomé convention.

It is for the Commission to decide how its staff complement is distributed but I certainly hope that it will give due weight to enhancing its own capacity to cover environmental concerns. We ourselves are temporarily financing a forestry expert to work within the Directorate-General for Development.

HEALTH

Home Chiropody Service (Nottingham)

Mr. Graham Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance and advice his Department issues to district health authorities regarding the home chiropody service.

Mrs. Currie: A circular HC(77)9 issued in April 1977 advised health authorities that while some domiciliary service would remain necessary, especially for elderly housebound people, for patients generally they should examine the scope for more economical alternatives which would not affect the standard of service, but would enable better use to be made of chiropodists' time. That advice remains unchanged. It is, however, for individual health authorities to determine the level of chiropody services that they provide, including domiciliary visits, in the light of their assessment both of local needs and of resources.

Eye Tests and Dental Examinations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department has on the numbers of people who currently have eye tests and dental examinations.

Mr. Mellor: We estimate that 11·7 million sight tests were undertaken in the general optical services in England in 1987-88. In the same period, just over 29 million dental examinations were undertaken in the general dental services.

Miss Sharon Campbell

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what conclusions the Government draw from the report of the committee of inquiry into the care and aftercare of Miss Sharon Campbell, Cm. 440.

Mrs. Currie: The report made a number of very helpful recommendations relating to the care of mentally disordered people in the community. It was drawn to the attention of health and local authorities to whom its contents will be of value in terms of service planning and good practice.

We are considering those recommendations which are specifically directed to the Secretary of State, and others which may require some action or consideration at national level. We shall, of course, take action to implement any changes that are necessary.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds are available for the Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association and what proposals he has for funding this group.

Mrs. Currie: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) on Tuesday 8 November at column *180*.

Brain Tumours

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is proposed or currently being undertaken into the cause of an above average number of brain tumours among male adults in certain parts of north Humberside.

Mrs. Currie: We have not yet received the assessment and advice to which I referred in my reply on 28 July to my hon. Friend at column *538*. We do not propose to consider further research before then. We are not aware of any similar research by anyone else.

Childhood Cancers

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received from experts on medical statistics following his request for an assessment of the report on childhood cancers in north Humberside.

Mrs. Currie: The advice is still awaited.

Nurses (Grading)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many appeals regarding *(a)* nurses and *(b)* midwives grading have been received by each district health authority; and what percentage that is of all nurses and midwives in each area;

(2) how many appeals have been heard in each of the last 15 days concerning nurses and midwives grading, for each grade A to G; how many were won and how many lost; how many persons were involved in each case;

(3) how many appeals have been lodged regarding nurses and midwives grading, how many persons are involved *(a)* in total and *(b)* by rank; how many involve each grade A to G; and how many appeals are expected to be heard in each of the next 10 weeks.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not hold this information centrally.

Stone Old People's Hospital

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has received for approval proposals to transfer Stone old people's hospital from the National Health Service to Stone elder centre.

Mrs. Currie: No.

AIDS

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he proposes to publish the report of the working group on the short-term prediction of HIV infection and AIDS in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The report has been published today. We are most grateful to Sir David Cox and members of the working group for their work in preparing this report. A copy has been placed in the Library.

The main conclusions of the report are:

- between 10,000 and 30,000 AIDS cases are likely to be diagnosed between 1987 and 1992, and the "recommended basis for planning" is 13,000 cases;
- by the end of 1992 between 7,500 and 17,000 persons are expected to have died from AIDS;
- assuming that no treatment emerges which significantly prolongs the life of people with AIDS, the number of living people with AIDS at a particular point in time is expected to rise from the present level of about 1,350 to a recommended basis for planning of over 5,000 by the end of 1992;
- the figures given above relate only to cases expected to be reported to the communicable disease surveillance centre under current conditions. Adjustments for under-reporting would increase them by at least 20 per cent.;
- the rate of increase in new AIDS cases is slowing, probably as a result of changes in behaviour of the homosexual community which occurred from about the mid-1980s, but the report stresses that "it would be a gross error to regard even the lower predictions as grounds for complacency". This, it says, is particularly so in view of the significant number of heterosexuals thought to be infected and the potential for spread within the general population. The report points out that any reversal of the changes which have led to the slowing down of the spread amongst homosexual men could lead to a further phase of rapid growth;
- by the end of 1987 between 20,000 and 50,000 persons were infected with HIV in England and Wales of whom some 13,000 to 30,000 were probably homosexual men. Between 2,000 and 5,500 are thought to have been infected through heterosexual contact, but assuming that most injecting drug misusers and haemophiliacs are heterosexual, the total pool of infected heterosexuals could be between 6,000 and 17,000;
- the group made no predictions about future numbers of HIV infections because these depend on unforseeable changes in behaviour patterns.

The Government accept the figures in the report as a basis for future planning.

We accept the report's recommendations for updating its predictions and for improving the present data collection arrangements. We are taking forward with the communicable disease surveillance centre arrangements for preparing annual updates of the projections for England and Wales. In Scotland similar annual updates of the predictions of the Tayler Report of 1987 will be undertaken in conjunction with the communicable diseases (Scotland) unit.

The recommendations for further research studies to improve epidemiological information, notably for large scale HIV surveillance based on anonymous testing, will be followed through as part of the action to improve HIV surveillance announced by my right hon. and learned Friend last week.

On the recommendations for improving the reporting systems for cases of HIV and AIDS we are inviting Dr. Joe Smith, director of the public health laboratory service, to make proposals to the chief medical officers on ways of reducing to a minimum the under-reporting of HIV infection and AIDS.

Retirement Homes

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations have been made to him regarding the regulation of privately managed retirement homes for the elderly;

(2) whether he has any proposals for the regulation and control of fees for privately managed retirement homes for the elderly; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The fees of private residential care homes for elderly people paid from private resources are a matter between the proprietors and fee payers. Assistance from public funds towards paying such fees was considered by Sir Roy Griffiths in his report "Community Care: an Agenda for Action". We have received many representations on the regulation of such homes since the publication of Sir Roy Griffiths' report and of the report of the independent review of residential care chaired by Lady Wagner, both of which included recommendations on this matter.

We are currently considering these reports and the responses to them and will be bringing forward our own proposals in due course. Copies of both reports are in the Library.

Seriously Injured Patients (Deaths)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set up an inquiry to establish why 30 per cent. of seriously injured patients admitted to accident and emergency units die from potentially treatable causes.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* No. We are not aware of any evidence that 30 per cent. of seriously injured patients admitted to accident and emergency departments die from potentially treatable causes. What the recent report of the Royal College of Surgeons on the management of patients with major injuries did put forward was the hypothesis that, of the patients who die, up to 30 per cent. do so from potentially treatable conditions. Most patients who are treated in accident and emergency units will eventually return home lafter treatment.

My hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State welcomed the report on the day it was published. Issues raised by the report are being carefully studied.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by what percentage total housing benefit for *(a)* Nottingham and *(b)* England and Wales has been reduced in the current year in the months for which comparable figures for 1987 are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Actual expenditure is collected only on an annual basis and the information for 1988-89 will not become available until mid-1989. However, the estimated 1988-89 annual expenditure on housing benefit in Nottingham shows a reduction of 1·9 per cent. from 1987-88. The estimated reduction for England and Wales is 2·9 per cent.

Lone Parents

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which organisation has been commissioned by his Department to undertake research on the behaviour of lone parents receiving benefits, referred to in his answer of 11 November, *Official Report*, column 225.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Independent research exploring the motivations and perceptions of lone parents receiving benefits has been commissioned from Professor Jonathan

Bradshaw of the social policy research unit at York university and Dr. Jane Millar of the centre for the analysis of social policy at Bath university.

A study of factors influencing the economic activity of lone parents, using family expenditure survey data, has also been commissioned from the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Retirement Pensions (Australia)

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to negotiate a new reciprocal agreement with the Government of Australia to ensure the indexation of retirement and widows' pensions being paid to British pensioners who live in Australia and Australian pensioners who live in Britain.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government have at present no plans to renegotiate the social security agreement with Australia so as to provide for the indexation of retirement and widows' pensions.

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of unfreezing the retirement pensions of British ex-service men and their widows now living in Australia.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I regret that separate statistics are not kept on the number of British ex-service men and their widows who receive United Kingdom retirement pensions and live in Australia. However, the cost of paying full rates of pensions and widows benefits to all United Kingdom pensioners in Australia, including British ex-service men and their widows, is estimated at 1988 rates to be £88 million a year.

Benefit Offices

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the results of the staffing review for his Department's benefit offices in the north-west will be announced.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The results of the staffing review were announced in the north-west during the week of 21 November 1988.

Sir Peter Blaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what new areas of work have been introduced in the last two years by his Department at their offices at Norcross and Warbreck hill, Blackpool; and to what extent the newly introduced work is at different grades compared with work previously done at these locations.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No new areas of work have been introduced in the last two years at the Department's Norcross site. At Warbreck hill the new family credit branch has absorbed the staff of the family income supplement unit, which it replaced. In order to accommodate the additional staff required for family credit, some work had to be moved to Newcastle Central office. The net result has been an increase of 123 posts at Warbreck hill.

The grading of administrative and executive staff employed on family credit work is broadly the same as for staff previously employed on family income supplement, with the temporary addition of management resources to oversee the introduction and early development of the new scheme.

DEFENCE

President Waldheim (War Record)

116. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement on the progress of the Government's inquiry into the circumstances of President Kurt Waldheim's involvement in the capture of British service men.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The review concerning the fate of captured British service men and the involvement, if any, of the then Lieutenant Waldheim is being conducted with all the speed consistent with the proper consideration of evidence and the need for accuracy. I can assure the hon. Member that the work is being brought as quickly as possible to its conclusion and that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) promised on 29 February, a report will be published.

Anglo-Egyptian Relations

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about Anglo-Egyptian defence relations.

Mr. Sainsbury: Anglo-Egyptian defence relations are excellent, as illustrated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's recent visit to Egypt for the El Alamein commemoration when a full range of matters of mutual interest were discussed with Egyptian Ministers.

Tendering Procedures

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the benefits of improved tenders procedures in securing better value for money.

Mr. Sainsbury: The improved tender procedures have contributed to the substantially better value for money which is now being achieved. Our commercial approach to defence procurement is also promoting the more efficient use of industrial resources which has stimulated innovative ideas and led to greater export success for British industry.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken to secure an international and comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 29 November to the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott).

Statistics (Non-Communist Countries)

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the number of infantry men in each of the non-communist countries of the world and the standard personal weapons issued to them.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Not all countries publish this information, and a comprehensive unclassified survey covering the many different types and definition of infantrymen and personal weapons cannot therefore be readily produced. However, some material is obtainable from open sources, and if the hon. Member would care to write to me with a particular query, I would be pleased to see what could be provided.

Soviet Chemical Weapon Capacity

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government not to give details of Government assessment methods of Soviet chemical weapon capacity.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our assessment of the Soviet Union's chemical warfare capability is based in part on classified sources. It would not be in the national interest to discuss such sources in detail.

Uranium

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria he uses in assessing what details of imports of uranium for defence purposes may be given in parliamentary answers.

Mr. Sainsbury: The national interest.

Warsaw Pact Forces

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the basis on which internal estimates of Warsaw pact central front forces are calculated by his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our estimate of Warsaw pact forces on the central front is based in part on classified sources. It would not be in the national interest to discuss such sources in detail.

Agency Status

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress in evaluation of the prospects for agency status for the Meteorological Office and non-nuclear research establishments.

Mr. Sainsbury: An initial report submitted in the summer put forward a prima facie case for establishing the Meteorological office as an agency. Further work is now proceeding to develop the necessary detailed structures. The report by the Defence research study team into the feasibility of establishing the non-nuclear defence research establishments as an agency was also submitted in the summer. We are now considering the way ahead in the light of its conclusions and recommendations.

Soviet Weapon Capacity

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, following his comments that the Soviet Union is producing a new submarine every six weeks, plus two new aircraft and eight new tanks each day, if he will make a statement on the basis for this information and how this has been verified for accuracy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our assessment of Soviet arms production is based on all available sources of information, some of which are classified. Every effort is made to ensure that our assessments are as accurate as possible.

INF Warheads

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what NATO decision has been taken on the use to which nuclear material recovered from the dismantlement of the withdrawn intermediate nuclear force warheads is to be put.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The use of materials from United States nuclear warheads withdrawn from Europe as a result of the INF treaty is a matter for the United States Government.

NATO

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement setting out details of the joint study with the Federal Republic of Germany on the binding of closer links in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation alliance, including its cost, time span, number of officials and ministers likely to be involved; and whether it will include evaluation of non-proliferation measures.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, agreed with Dr. Scholz on 4 October that a joint study should be undertaken on British-German bilateral defence co-operation to consider practical ways in which our already close links can be further strengthened within the Alliance, and to examine the scope for increasing public awareness of them. Work at official level is well underway and my right hon. Friend expects to discuss the matter further with Dr. Scholz later this week. It is too early to say what the outcome of the study will be; however, it is not at present addressing non-proliferation measures, which are dealt with on a multilateral basis within the Alliance. The costs of the study will be minimal.

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply on Tuesday 29 November at column *178*.

Nitroglycerine

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the retention of a United Kingdom-based capability to manufacture nitroglycerine.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 25 November 1988]*: We keep the requirements for our defence industrial base for ammunition, and its components, under continuing review.

Royal Ordnance

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his agreement with Royal Ordnance for the supply of explosives, propellants and ammunition includes any conditions relating to the maintenance of reserve capacity in Royal Ordnance factories.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 25 November 1988]*: The agreement relates only to the requirement for Royal Ordnance to deliver to the MOD, at annually reducing prices, specified quantities of ammunition in the fiscal years prior to March 1993. I am satisfied that Royal Ordnance is capable of meeting our foreseeable requirements, supplemented by other supplies as necessary.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times he has discussed the retention of specific manufacturing capabilities with the management of Royal Ordnance since it was sold.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* None. We await the outcome of the Royal Ordnance rationalisation plans.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Domestic Spending

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage rise in total domestic spending each year since 1978, including the estimate for 1988; and what has been the target for each of these years in the medium-term financial strategy.

Mr. Major: The growth in total United Kingdom domestic expenditure at current market prices since 1978 was as follows:

Percent change in total domestic expenditure

	Per cent.
1978	14·6
1979	18·1
1980	14·9
1981	9·6
1982	10·1
1983	10·3
1984	7·8
1985	8·1
1986	8·8
1987	9·1
1988	11·4

Source: United Kingdom National Accounts 1988 Edition (table 1.2) CSO except for 1988 which is an estimate [consistent with the forecast published in the autumn statement.]

There are no "targets" for domestic expenditure in the medium term financial strategy.

NHS Ancillary Services (VAT)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had on the payment of value added tax on private contracts for the provision of National Health Service ancillary services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: These matters are kept under continuous review.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the timetable for the imposition of value added tax on domestic construction; and what response he has made.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Member no doubt intended to refer to non-domestic construction.

There have been a large number of written responses to the consultation paper issued on 21 June a number of which commented on the timetable. The majority of those wanted the implementation date implied by my statement on 21 June (1 April 1989) to be deferred to 1 August 1989. All responses to the consultation paper are being considered carefully. Draft legislation is being prepared for exposure in the new year.

Interest Rates

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current level of interest rates.

Mr. Lilley: Bank base rates are 13 per cent.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the future movement in interest rates over the next year.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 29 November 1988]:* Interest rates will remain as high as they need be, for as long as it takes, to bring inflationary pressures back under control.

Mortgages

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the months since May 1979 in which average building society mortgage rates were below 10 per cent.; what has been the average charged in the previous two decades; and if he will consider imposing an upper limit to mortgage interest relief if and when the average rate falls below 10 per cent. to reduce the amount of relief by one-fifth for each half per cent. fall in the rate of interest.

Mr. Norman Lamont: No.

Taxation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what relative priority the Government accord to *(a)* further reductions in income tax and *(b)* an increase in means-tested social security benefits as a means of reducing dependency.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The sound economic policies pursued by this Government have allowed both reductions in the rate of income tax and increases in spending in priority areas. We intend to continue in this way.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the present tax paid on petrol and motor oils.

Mr. Peter Lilley *[holding answer 29 November 1988]:* Decisions on excise duty rates are a matter for my right hon. Friend's Budget.

Money Supply

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in the money supply since May 1979; and what contribution was made by the public and private sectors, respectively.

Mr. Lilley: Figures for the money supply are published regularly in the Bank of England "Quarterly Bulletin," "Financial Statistics" and "Economic Trends." Most of the published aggregates are defined as assets of private sector United Kingdom residents. There is therefore no public sector contribution. M0 is an exception and includes all currency in circulation, including that held in the public sector. No split between public and private sector holdings is available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the percentage increase in the real money supply between February 1974 and May 1979 and between May 1979 and the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Lilley: There is no universally accepted definition of the real money supply. But figures for the money supply are published regularly in the Bank of England "Quarterly Bulletin," "Financial Statistics" and "Economic Trends." A wide range of price indices and deflators is published in official statistical sources.

Privatisation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the dates of each of the privatisation sales since 1979, together with the amount of money received from each separate sale.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Moneys received together with dates of sales up to the end of 1987-88 are as follows:

Company	*Date of sale*	*Net proceeds (£ million) to 1987-88*
Amersham International	February 1982	64
Associated British Ports	February 1983	46
	April 1984	51
BAA	July 1987	[1]534
British Aerospace	February 1981	43
	May 1985	347
British Airways	January 1987	854
British Gas	December 1986	[2]3,587
British Petroleum	October 1979	276
	June 1981	8
	September 1983	543
	October 1987	[3]859
British Sugar Corporation	July 1981	44
British Telecom	November 1984	3,685
Britoil	November 1982	627
	August 1985	426
Cable and Wireless	October 1981	181
	December 1983	263
	December 1985	577
Enterprise Oil	June 1984	384
National Enterprise Board holdings	December 1979 onwards	354
Forestry Commission	ongoing	114
National Freight Consortium	February 1982	5
Plant Breeding Institute	September 1987	66
Rolls-Royce	May 1987	1,028
Royal Ordnance	April 1987	187
Miscellaneous[4]		2,252
Total[5]		17,401

[1] Total estimated net proceeds £1·160 million; 2nd instalment 19 May 1988.

[2] Total estimated net proceeds £5,080 million; 3rd instalment 19 April 1988.

[3] Total estimated net proceeds £5,310 million; 2nd instalment 30 August 1988, 3rd instalment due 27 April 1989.

[4] Includes British Gas Debt, British Telecom Loan Stock and Preference Shares, Land Settlement, Motorway Service Leases, New Town Development, Commodity Stocks, Oil Stockpiles and North Sea Oil Licences.

[5] Figures exclude proceeds from sales of subsidiaries; these are retained by parent industry. Main sales in this category were:

		£ million
1982-83	International Aeradio (BA)	60
	British Rail Hotels	30
1983-84	British Rail Hotels	15
1984-85	Jaguar (BL)	297
	Sealink (BR)	40
	Wytch Farm (BGC)	82
1985-86	Warship Yards (BS)	54
	Sealink (BR)	26
1986-87	BA Helicopters	14
	Unipart (Rover)	up to 52
	Leyland Bus (Rover)	4
	British Coal Subsidiaries	0·5
1987-88	British Transport Advertising	40·5
	Istel (subsidiary of Rover Group)	47·6

European Community Grants

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on European Economic Community social and regional grants to the United Kingdom and their relation to domestic funding.

Mr. Brooke: Receipts from the Community's structural funds are taken into account each year when the United Kingdom's public expenditure plans are set, thus enabling public spending as a whole—and specifically expenditure on programmes to which the receipts relate—to be fixed and maintained at higher levels than would otherwise have been possible. As regards individual projects and programmes financed by structural fund grants, it is a condition of Community assistance that member states pay a specified share of the total cost from domestic funds.

Security Service Personnel (Pensions)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many former members of the security services are drawing public pensions.

Mr. Brooke: In common with previous Administrations it is not the practice of this Government to provide information of this nature about the security services.

Inflation

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest forecast for the level of inflation in 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: In his autumn statement the Chancellor forecast that the retail prices index in the last quarter of 1989 would be 5 per cent. higher than a year earlier.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current rate of inflation.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 29 November 1988]:* The rate of retail prices index inflation was 6·4 per cent. in October 1988.

Business Expansion Scheme

Mr. Mans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the implementation of the extension of the BES to private rented housing.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 29 November 1988]:* This year's Finance Act extended the BES to companies specialising in letting properties on new-style assured tenancy terms. The scheme applies to investment in shares issued after 29 July (Royal Assent) and the indications are that it will be highly successful. The Government are confident that the extension of the scheme will make a significant impact on the supply of private rented housing.

Oil revenue

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of North sea oil revenue accruing to the Government from all sources for each year since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 29 November 1988]:* The latest figures for Government revenues from United Kingdom oil and gas production in each year from 1979-80 are as follows:

£ million

	Royalties	*Petroleum Revenue Tax*[1]	*Corporation Tax before ACT set-off*	*Supplementary Petroleum Duty*
1979-80	628	1,435	250	—
1980-81	992	2,410	341	—
1981-82	1,396	2,390	681	2,025
1982-83	1,632	3,274	521	2,395
1983-84	1,904	6,017	877	—
1984-85	2,426	7,177	2,425	—
1985-86	2,057	6,375	2,917	—
1986-87	919	1,188	2,683	—
1987-88	1,024	2,296	1,350	—

[1] Including advance payments

International Monetary Fund

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet Mr. Michael Camdessus, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Peter Lilley *[holding answer 29 November 1988]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer expects to meet Mr. Camdessus, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, at the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank, next April. He would normally discuss a wide range of international financial issues.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his policy towards releasing the monthly unemployment figures to *(a)* journalists and *(b)* hon. and right hon. Members.

Mr. Cope: The figures are made available to anyone who requests them from the set time of release. In particular, every effort is made to ensure that all right hon. and hon. Members can have access to the figures as soon as they are published. Copies of the press notices are made available in the Library, where additional more detailed information can also be obtained via the computer database.

Local Employer Networks

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many local employer networks are presently in operation in England and Wales; and how many more are planned for 1988-89.

Mr. Cope: At the end of October, 98 local employer networks were operating in England and Wales. A further six applications are currently being considered, and discussions are taking place with three organisations showing an interest in applying to "host" a local employer network.

Job Clubs

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have obtained a job whilst participating in job clubs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The number of people participating in the job club programme who have found jobs since April 1986 (when central records begin) is 115,815. A further 29,531 have also gone into other positive outcomes, such as training or a place on community programme or the enterprise allowance scheme.

I am pleased with the continuing success of job clubs in giving positive help to long-term unemployed people. Around 70 per cent. of all those joining the programme achieve a positive outcome.

YTS (Clothing Industry)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many YTS trainees in the clothing industry have employed status and have their allowance made up to the minimum rate for the job by the company; and what percentage this is of the total.

Mr. Cope: At the end of September 1988 YTS records show 12,600 young people in training on YTS in clothing and textiles manufacturing occupations. Of these 5,700 (45 per cent.) has employed status.

Information is not available on the number of trainees who have their allowance made up to the minimum rate for the job by the company.

Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employment training participants there are in the London borough of Newham.

Mr. Nicholls: In November 1988 there were 264 people in training on employment training in the London borough of Newham.

Equal Pay

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent discussions he has had with the Confederation of British Industry concerning equal pay for work of equal value and the House of Lords rulings in the case of Hayward v Cammell Laird and Pickstone v Freemans.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend has had no such discussions, although I understand that the CBI has these matters under consideration.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to introduce legislation to protect employees being discriminated against on account of their age.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, in the light of the Court of Appeal ruling of 9 November 1988, in the matter of Rayware Ltd. and another *v* Transport and General Workers Union and another, he plans to introduce amendments to section 15 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974 as substituted by section 16 of the Employment Act 1980 and amended by section 21 of schedule 3 to the Employment Act 1982.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to amend this legislation, but the matter is kept under review.

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on Monday 28 November at column *218*. My Department has no plans to seek removal of Crown immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Self-government

114. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the United Kingdom will sign the Council of Europe's charter for local self-government; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on 24 November, at column *10*.

Right to Buy

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will consider setting Camden council a public target for dealing with the backlog of offer notices under the right-to-buy legislation;

(2) if he will consider setting the London borough of Newham public targets for dealing with its backlog of offer notices under the right-to-buy legislation.

Mr. Trippier: I am requiring regular monthly reports from Camden and Newham councils on progress towards eliminating backlogs. I will take whatever action seems appropriate in the light of the reports.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tenants are waiting for but have not been served an offer notice under the right-to-buy laws within the statutory time limit in *(a)* Camden, *(b)* Brent, *(c)* Lewisham and *(d)* Newham; and how many tenants have been served with such notices in each of these boroughs during each of the last three months.

Mr. Trippier: The latest available information is:

(a) Offer notices not served within the staturory time limit, as at 31 October 1988

	Number
Camden	[1]2,349
Brent	1,350
Lewisham	1,595
Newham	1,300

[1] 30 September.

(b) Offer notices served in the last three months

	August	*September*	*October*
Camden	135	111	n.a.
Brent	22	34	183
Lewisham	182	125	257
Newham	168	165	166

Football (Arrests)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is his estimate of the number of arrests *(a)* within football grounds in the 1987-88 season and *(b)* in the vicinity of football grounds on match days during the same period;

(2) at how many division III and division IV football matches no arrests were made in the 1987-88 season.

Mr. Moynihan: Total arrests at English league matches during the 1987-88 season were 6,147 with 6,542 ejections, 11 per cent. and 1 per cent. up on the 1986-87 totals respectively. The relevant statistics away from grounds on match days are not available.

Identity Cards

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the proposed identity card system will apply to non-league club supporters attending Football Association cup matches.

Mr. Moynihan: This issue is discussed in the report of my working party on the national membership scheme, published on 9 November. I have sent a copy of the report to my hon. Friend. The report recommends that supporters of non-league clubs should not be required to produce membership cards for FA cup matches involving league teams. This is a matter that we will be considering further when our legislative proposals are published.

Wildlife (Protection)

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list any of the administrative implications of the proposed draft European Commission directive on wildlife habitat protection which he will seek to raise with the Commission; and what representations he has had on the subject from the National Farmers Union.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The draft directive proposed a rigid and bureaucratic system of nature conservation. At the Environment Council in Brussels on 24 November, member states unanimously rejected this approach. The majority agreed that the objective of any Community action should be to assist member states, as necessary, to achieve implementation of the relevant existing international conventions.

We have received no representations from the National Farmers Union on this subject.

Greenhouse Effect

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has commissioned, or has planned, on the role of nuclear power, energy conservation and renewable energy sources in reducing carbon dioxide emissions and the greenhouse effect; if he will list any such studies which have been published and place copies in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department is currently considering what further studies would be timely and appropriate on all aspects of responses to the issue of greenhouse gas emissions. This will take into account the role of the working group on responses recently set up by the UNEP/WMO Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change. We will certainly build on the expertise available at the Building Research Establishment on energy conservation in buildings, and on the extensive energy efficiency and renewable sources programmes run by the Department of Energy.

Vehicle Emissions

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the 1987 emissions of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides from automobile and freight transport.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information available relates to emissions from petrol-engined and diesel-engined road vehicles. The basis for estimation is constantly being updated, and a major revision took place in 1988. For comparability, therefore, figures are given for the years 1977-1987.

Carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides: estimated emissions from road vehicles, by type of fuel

United Kingdom

	CO2	*CO*	*NOx*
	million tonnes	*thousand tonnes*	
Petrol-engined Vehicles			
1977	15·2	3,629	432
1978	16·1	3,841	458
1979	16·4	3,911	466
1980	16·8	4,007	477
1981	16·4	3,867	467
1982	16·9	4,187	497
1983	17·1	3,824	462
1984	17·7	3,812	471
1985	17·9	3,934	489
1986	18·8	4,146	520
1987	19·4	4,390	558
Diesel-engined Vehicles			
1977	4·8	76	417
1978	5·0	78	429
1979	5·1	81	442
1980	5·0	78	428
1981	4·7	75	420
1982	4·9	79	435
1983	5·2	70	399
1984	5·7	72	418
1985	6·0	73	426
1986	6·7	75	440
1987	7·2	80	473

Methane

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 1987 emissions of methane in the United Kingdom, by source, in million metric tonnes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is not available.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 1987 production and usage of chlorofluorocarbons in the United Kingdom, and the projections for 1990 and 1995.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Production and use figures for chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are not given separately for the United Kingdom (UK) or any individual member state of the European Community (EC). Figures for production and use (sales) in the EC in 1987 are not yet available. Following are 1986 figures for CFCs 11, 12, 113 and 114:

	CFC 11/12 000 tonnes	*CFC 113/114 000 tonnes*
EC Production	372	66
EC Use (Sales)	259	48

Source: European Council of Chemical Manufacturers' Federation. Figures for CFC 115 are not available.

The Montreal protocol provides for production and consumption of CFCs 11, 12, 113, 114 and 115 to be frozen at 1986 levels by 1990, reduced by 20 per cent. by 1994 and by a further 30 per cent. by 1999. The regulation adopted in October 1988 to implement the protocol within the EC provides for the consumption obligations to be fulfilled by the Community as a whole. The United Kingdom has called for the protocol to be strengthened so as to reduce CFC emissions by at least 85 per cent. by the end of the century.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the reasons which underlie his policy decision to rely on voluntary measures by industry to reduce pollution by chlorofluorocarbons.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The provisions of the regulation to implement the Montreal protocol in the European Community for controlling productions and consumption of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and halons are directly binding on producing and importing companies. Within the EC, consumption is to be controlled by control of overall supply not specific uses. Market forces will determine how available supplies are used. It is within this overall regulatory framework that we expect user industries to take steps on a voluntary basis to reduce the use of CFCs and halons to the maximum possible extent. EC Environment Ministers on 16 June asked the European Commission in co-operation with member states to initiate discussions with European industry to this end. Controls on specific uses are not necessary. A voluntary approach is simple, quick and effective. In the United Kingdom and some other EC member states action has already been taken on a voluntary basis to reduce CFCs in aerosols: the United Kingdom aerosol industry expects to phase-out non-essential use of CFCs in aerosols by the end of 1989.

Carbon Monoxide

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 1987 emissions of carbon monoxide in the United Kingdom, by source, in million metric tonnes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is as follows:

Carbon monoxide: estimated emissions by source

United Kingdom, 1987	*Million tonnes*
Domestic	·42
Commercial-public service	·01
Power stations	·05
Refineries	. .
Agriculture (fuel use)	. .
Other industry	·08
Rail transport	·01
Road transport	4·47
Incinerators and agricultural burning	·2
All sources	5·26

. . = less than 5,000 tonnes.

Planning Consent

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to change the law which allows a developer to dig a short trench which by doing so satisfies the definition of a specified activity and thereby enables that developer artificially to preserve a planning consent without undertaking any real development on the site.

Mr. Chope: The Government have no present plans to amend the definition of a specified operation for the commencement of development given in section 43 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. Local planning authorities have power to serve a completion notice under section 44 of the Act if they consider that a development will not be completed within a reasonable period.

Mrs. Ana Maria Quick

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to reply to the letter of the hon. Member for South Hams of 20 October concerning Mrs. Ana Maria Quick of 8 MacAndrew Walk, Ivybridge, Devon.

Mr. Chope: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 28 November 1988.

Air Pollution

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what policy considerations underlie the United Kingdom's decision not to make a commitment to a 30 per cent. cut in nitrogen oxide emissions in 1988 at the international meeting on air pollution control held in Bulgaria on 1 November.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The proposition before the meeting of the executive body of the UN/ECE convention on long-range transboundary air pollution was a protocol on the control of emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) or their transboundary fluxes. The protocol commits signatories to halt the hitherto inexorable rise in NOx emissions (bringing emissions back to 1987 levels by 1994), to apply suitable standards to stationary and mobile sources, and by 1996 to have adopted control policies based on the "critical loads" which the environment can tolerate.

The United Kingdom and 24 other countries signed the protocol. More indicated their hope to sign in the near future. This represents a major international commitment.

The United Kingdom is committed to taking action on the basis of scientific study of the problems caused by acid deposition and the implications of various possible solutions. The 1979 convention provides the right forum for advancing the international consensus which is essential if transboundary air pollution problems are to be successfully tackled.

Before the protocol was due to be signed the Government received an invitation to sign a draft declaration to the effect that they would by 1998 achieve reductions in NOx emissions of at least 30 per cent. measured from a baseline of any year between 1980 and 1985.

We did not think it right to commit ourselves both to an arbitrary percentage target for 1998 and to the quite different "critical loads" approach of the protocol for the earlier date of 1996.

At the last moment the draft declaration was reduced to a commitment to achieve reductions "in the order of 30 per cent." from a baseline of any year between 1980 and 1986.

Twelve countries signed this version on 31 October. It is uncertain from the final wording what action they mean to take. The protocol is specific.

Radioactive Waste

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the environmental advantages and disadvantages of reprocessing in regard to the production of volumes of radioactive waste.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government's position on reprocessing is contained in the Government's response to the House of Commons Environment Committee's report (Cmnd. 9852, paragraphs 75-82).

The following reports of research commissioned by DOE address the environmental implications of different approaches to spent fuel management.

(i) Management of Spent Oxide Fuel from Thermal Reactors: the Environmental and Radiological Effects of Alternative Approaches—Associated Nuclear Services. Ref. DOE/RW/83-086.
(ii) Direct Disposal of Spent Nuclear Fuel: the Current Status of Technology, January 1987—National Nuclear Corporation Ltd. Ref. DOE/RW/87-021.
(iii) Magnox Fuel Dry Storage and Direct Disposal: Assessment of CEGB/SSEB Reports—Ove Arup and Partners. Ref. DOE/RW/87-125.

These reports are publicly available through the British Lending Library.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if there are any technical problems remaining to be solved in the disposal of *(a)* low level radioactive waste, *(b)* intermediate level radioactive waste, *(c)* high level heat generated radioactive waste and *(d)* unreprocessed spent nuclear fuel.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no fundamental technical problems to be solved in the disposal of radioactive waste. Work is continuing in order to demonstrate the safety of disposal.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what are the current estimated costs *(a)* per cubic metre and *(b)* per mile of transporting radioactive wastes in each of the low, intermediate and high level categories;

(2) what are the current estimated costs per cubic metre of packaging radioactive wastes in the low, intermediate and high level categories;

(3) what are the current costs per cubic metre of storing radioactive wastes in each of the low, intermediate and high level categories.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The costs of transporting, packaging and storing radioactive wastes are matters for the waste producers.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, under current or planned European Commission research programmes, the option of subseabed emplacement or disposal of *(a)* low, *(b)* intermediate and *(c)* high level radioactive wastes has been examined.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Seabed disposal of radioactive wastes forms part of the current programme of research at the European joint research centre, Ispra, Italy. The future EC research programme on radioactive waste management has not yet been defined.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the current and future estimated costs per cubic metre of the disposal of radioactive wastes in each of the low, intermediate and high level categories.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Nirex estimates the costs of disposal of low and intermediate level radioactive wastes as:

Intermediate level wastes
—Land based deep repository: £2,000 to £7,000 per cubic metre.
—Offshore deep repository: up to £14,000 per cubic metre.
Low level wastes
—Deep repository: £750 to £2,000 per cubic metre.

For high level wastes accurate cost estimates are not possible as waste in this category will not be disposed of for at least 50 years. An indicative estimate is £500 per litre.

Ozone Layer

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any report from the chairman of the United Kingdom stratospheric ozone review group in regard to co-ordinating ozone layer research in the European Economic Community following the meeting in October in the Netherlands of European ozone researchers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The meeting in the Hague on 15 and 16 October to discuss coordination of EC/EFTA research on the ozone layer was called by the United Kingdom Government and the Commission of the European Communities. Officials of the Department were present and there was no need for a report from the chairman of the stratospheric ozone review group, who was also present. The Department is now taking steps to set up a co-ordination unit, based in the United Kingdom, following decisions taken at the Hague meeting.

Water Supply (Cuts)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses have had their water cut off for each of the years from 1979 to the present by water authority regions.

Mr. Moynihan: The information requested by the hon. Member is in the table below; a breakdown of disconnections of households for non-payment is not available for years prior to 1984-85.

Data on the duration of disconnections is not held centrally.

Household disconnections for non-payment

Authority	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Anglian	218	774	2,268	1,586
North West	110	238	457	448
Northumbrian	70	59	300	480
Severn Trent	650	1,074	1,000	932
South West	76	404	404	324
Southern	115	1,249	1,152	1,164
Thames	788	225	576	1,594
Welsh	90	350	950	1,785
Wessex	0	0	0	32
Yorkshire	25	189	293	560

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will produce a table showing the number of houses having water cut off by region and by length of time cut off for the year 1987.

Mr. Moynihan: Data on the duration of disconnections is not held centrally.

Fauna, Flora and Habitats

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's policy on, and response to, the draft Economic Community directive on the protection of threatened fauna, flora and habitats; and what legislative measures would be necessary to implement such a directive.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At the Environment Council in Brussels on 24 November member states unanimously rejected the approach embodied in the Commission's draft directive. We await revised proposals.

Emission Controls

Mr. Jack Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on Tuesday 29 November. The Department has no plans to seek to remove Crown immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations.

Electric Bulbs

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what policy Her Majesty's Government follows in respect of the use of low-energy use and long-life electric bulbs.

Mr. Chope: It is Government policy to use the most cost-effective and energy efficient form of lighting appropriate to the circumstances.

Brundtland Report

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in the light of the Brundtland report "Our Common Future", he will consider publishing an annual report on how Government policies, programmes and spending are being redirected towards global sustainable development.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Prime Minister's foreword to the United Kingdom's response to the Brundtland report, published in July, stated that Government Departments had been invited to examine their policies in the light of the report's recommendations. Promoting sustainable development on a global scale must be achieved through concerted action by the entire international community. The Government are not persuaded that publishing an annual report would be the best way to make progress. The United Kingdom is already taking a leading role within organisations such as the United Nations and OECD to ensure that the main thrust of the report's conclusions is integrated into their activities.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reasons he decided to allocate to the Nature Conservancy Council for 1989-90 less than the council requested; and what criteria he used in deciding the amount of the allocation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Nature Conservancy Council's alocation for 1989-90 is based on the forward planning figures first notified to the council in November 1987, together with an additional sum of £0·5 million towards new expenditure which the council expects to incur in protecting important wildlife habitats in Caithness and Sutherland.

The allocation will allow the council to fulfil its essential commitments, and is set in the context of the Government's wider policy of restraining public expenditure. The scope for the Nature Conservancy Council to improve its efficiency and generate more revenue from publications and research was also taken into account.

Rating Reform

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to amend the Local Government Finance Act 1988 in respect of *(a)* the community charge provisions, *(b)* the revenue support grant and *(c)* the national non-domestic rate.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman must wait and see.

Local Plans

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will issue guidance on the preparation of local plans, following the consultations undertaken in June.

Mr. Ridley: Two further planning policy guidance notes are being published today, adding to the framework of concise national planning guidance issued earlier this year. PPG12 provides guidance on local plans and PPG13 on highway considerations in development control. Copies of both have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Our proposals for a much wider coverage of statutory development plans have been well received. Each district council should have a plan setting out its policies and proposals for development and conservation, to guide them in their decisions on individual planning applications and to provide guidance to developers and reassurance to local people about the future pattern of development in their area. Local plans are particularly necessary for areas where there is strong pressure for new development.

Local plans may also demonstrate the need for broad phasing of new development and for density policies to protect the character of established residential areas.

Where such plans are up to date and consistent with national and regional policies and with the relevant provisions of the structure plan, they will carry considerable weight in determining planning applications and appeals.

Private Sheltered Housing

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has received any representations seeking regulations of service charges and management fees levied by landlords and agents of private sheltered housing.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 29 November 1988]:* My Department received a number of such representations earlier this year. We therefore welcomed the initiative taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) in setting up a working party with representatives of the retirement housing industry and consumer interests; I hope their code of practice for the industry will be completed and available soon.

Mersey Basin

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information he has as to the levels of mercury found in fish tested within the Mersey basin area;

(2) what information he has as to the levels of dissolved oxygen in the waters of the Mersey basin.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 29 November 1988]:* As the hon. Member will be aware, the Mersey Basin Campaign is the long-term Government-launched initiative to tackle both water pollution and landward dereliction in this important part of the country. The Department works with many bodies and operational agencies in the campaign organisation, and they carry responsibility in the first instance for much of the detailed information involved.

On mercury levels the relevant tests are on fish for human consumption and, in fact, are carried out in Liverpool bay and the Irish sea—not within the Mersey basin area itself where there are no commercial fisheries. the latest information I have from sea tests is that the level of mercury in fish flesh is 0·2 mg per kg net weight, which is below the EC limit of 0·3 mg.

As to levels of dissolved oxygen in the Mersey system, detailed measurements are carried out by North West water authority as part of its operations. I suggest that the hon. Member should approach the authority direct for any detailed information, and interpretation, he may require. Meanwhile, I understand from the authority that levels of dissolved oxygen are increasing throughout the system, including trouble spots such as the upper estuary.

Azores

Mr. Buckley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the provisions of the draft European Community directive on the protection of fauna, flora and habitats extend to the Azores.

Mrs. Chalker: I have been asked to reply.

Yes.

ENERGY

Magnox

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list his estimate at 1987-88 prices for decommissioning Magnox, advanced gas cooled reactor and pressurised water reactor nuclear power stations; what sums are currently set aside by the Central Electricity Generating Board and the South of Scotland Electricity Board respectively, for this purpose; and if he will make a statement on his Departmental responsibility once the electricity supply industry is privatised;

(2) what provisions have been made in their annual accounts by the Central Electricity Generating Board and the South of Scotland Electricity Board, respectively, for the decommissioning of Magnox and other nuclear reactors in the period 1970-87, at 1987 prices;

(3) how he will ensure that following privatisation adequate finance is available to cover the full costs of decommissioning Magnox reactors, including both the removal and storage costs of nuclear waste involved.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The total of the board's provisions for decommissioning, reprocessing of irradiated fuel and other liabilities, including the additional provision of £732 million made in 1987-88, was £3,367 million at 31 March 1988.

After privatisation, provisions will continue to be made for decommissioning; and these will continue to be recovered in electricity prices.

Estimates of decommissioning costs are a matter for the CEGB. Matters relating to the SSEB are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Energy Efficiency (Housing)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list Government funding for energy efficiency of housing by way of the homes insulation scheme and of community insulation projects over each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Government expenditure on homes insulation scheme grants and current estimated total expenditure on the Community insulation projects over the period 1983-84 to 1987-88 were as follows:

	Homes Insulation Scheme (£ million)	*Community Insulation Projects (£ million)*
1983-84	25·5	5·5
1984-85	25·3	8·6
1985-86	28·0	19·4
1986-87	26·5	36·6
1987-88	[1]21·6	45·2

[1] Provisional.

North Sea Installations

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what role trade unions play in health and safety on North sea installations.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Trade unions play a role in offshore safety through their membership of the Health and Safety Commission's oil industry advisory committee and through formal and informal consultation procedures particularly with regard to new safety legislation. My safety directorate officials meet unions on a regular basis and upon request.

Nuclear Safety

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will arrange for publication in the *Official Report* of the resolutions on nuclear waste dumping and nuclear safety sponsored by the United Kingdom at the International Atomic Energy Authority 32nd regular session of the general conference.

Mr. Michael Spicer: A copy of both resolutions will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he is satisfied with the efficiency and effectiveness of the present International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards system as reported in the latest available International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards implementation report.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Yes.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he is now in a position to make a statement on the implications for the United Kingdom of the report of the European Parliament Energy Research and Technology Committee on Sellafield and EURATOM safeguards implementation.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No. On 27 October the European Parliament voted against the resolution based on the report of the committee.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has made any evaluation of the failures of safeguards implementation listed in the 1987 International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards implementation report, in regard to United Kingdom facilities, nuclear technology exported by the United Kingdom and nuclear materials exported under safeguards by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The agency's conclusion as given in the 1987 annual report was that the nuclear material under agency safeguards in 1987 remained in peaceful nuclear activities or was otherwise adequately accounted for.

Euratom

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to initiate the full implementation of Euratom treaty articles 88 and 89.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No. It is for the European Commission to initiate such proposals.

Hinkley Point C

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish an estimate of *(a)* the cost of the departmental representation at the Hinkley Point C inquiry, *(b)* the volume of direct follow-up work in the form of written inquiries by objectors and *(c)* the continued commitment by departmental staff to monitor developments in the inquiry.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Department of Energy officials gave evidence at the Hinkley Point C inquiry from 26 October to 2 November inclusive. The expenses incurred by the Department's official witness, his two technical witnesses, and their backup team attending the inquiry were about £4,500.

There have been two subsequent written inquiries by objectors; my Department has replied to one, and will reply to the other as soon as possible.

Officials of my Department will be following developments at the inquiry as appropriate.

Parliamentary Questions

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will outline the policy considerations which underlie his refusal to review all replies given since June 1987 that give no substantive reply on the grounds that such were only possible at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Parkinson: It is my policy to give a full answer wherever possible, whilst having regard to the efficient use of my Department's resources.

Light Bulbs

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if his Department, or consultants to his Department, have made any recent study on the cost savings arising from the total replacement of incandescent light bulbs in use in *(a)* the domestic sector, *(b)* the industrial sector, *(c)* the commercial sector and *(d)* Government buildings with compact fluorescent lights.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No recent extensive studies related to lamp replacement have been carried out. However, my Department has supported several projects concerned with improved lighting design and control in commercial and public buildings under the energy efficiency office's energy efficiency demonstration scheme. These have demonstrated that cost effective energy savings of over 50 per cent. can be achieved.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps are being taken to promote the sale and use of low-energy use and long-life electric bulbs.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The energy efficiency office promotes high efficiency lighting as part of its general promotion of energy efficiency measures. In addition, the lighting industry promotes energy efficient lighting as part of its commercial operations.

Nuclear Fuel (Electricity Reactors)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will now list separately for each year from April 1980 to March 1986 the proportion of total annual throughput of nuclear fuel arising from electricity board reactors.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member on 16 February 1988, at columns *591-92*.

Nuclear Accidents (Compensation)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has yet responded to a recent letter from the Director General of the Confederation of British Industry requesting public sector liability for civil compensation in the event of a serious nuclear accident following privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend will be replying to Mr. Banham in due course.

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mr. Parkinson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on Tuesday 29 November 1988 at column *178*. My Department has no plans to seek removal of Crown immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations.

Electricity Supply (Privatisation)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what departmental response has been made to the recent letter sent to his Department by John Baker, the Central Electricity Generating Board managing director and also chief executive designate of National Power, regarding the implication of costs transference to customers of nuclear power plant operation under privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Michael Spicer: It is not Government practice to reveal the details of confidential correspondence.

Plutonium

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what assessment he has made on the desirability of large-scale plutonium shipments by sea in *(a)* surface vessels or *(b)* submarines from facilities in the United Kingdom;

(2) if he will make a statement on the recently negotiated modification to annex B of the United States-Japan nuclear agreement regarding the sea shipment of separated plutonium outlining what he now regards as *(a)* the preferable and *(b)* the most likely transport arrangements for the return of separated plutonium to Japan after THORP is in service in 1992.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Transport options for returning the plutonium arising from the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel at THORP are still under consideration. Before any decision is taken all necessary safety and security aspects will be carefully considered.

Fawley B Power Station

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, following the recent announcement to cancel plans to build Fawley B power station, the Central Electricity Generating Board has informed him of any revision in its overall nuclear and fossil fuel power station construction programme and electricity forecasts.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The CEGB's proposals to build a coal-fired power station at Fawley have not been cancelled. As my right hon. Friend announced to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on 27 October 1988 at column *320* the CEGB has been given until 1 May 1989 to advise my right hon. Friend whether it wishes to proceed with the application.

I understand that in evidence to the Hinkley Point inquiry the CEGB has advised that its expected application to construct a PWR at Wylfa will not now be submitted until the spring of 1989. The board also advised the Hinkley Point inspector that its forecasts of electricity demand had increased to show a requirement for new capacity by the year 2000 of 15·5 GW.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

US President-elect

13. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will meet the President-elect of the United States of America.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall be taking an early opportunity to visit the United States of America to meet the new Administration.

EC (Social Cohesion)

14. **Mr. McTaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government will take to ensure that the European Community carries out its duty to promote social cohesion among its member countries.

Mrs. Chalker: The objectives of economic and social cohesion are set out in articles 130A and 130C of the treaty of Rome. To this end we have agreed to double the structural funds by 1993. Provision has been made for spending of 52 billion ecu (£34 billion at current prices) up to 1992 to be concentrated in the less developed regions of the Community.

Dr. Jonas Savimbi

15. **Mr. Mudd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the recent initiatives of Dr. Jonas Savimbi of UNITA, calling for a cessation of hostilities without pre-conditions and a negotiated settlement.

Mrs. Chalker: I have seen press reports of Mr. Savimbi's statements. We would welcome any move to establish internal peace in Angola which had the support of both sides.

Namibia

16. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had on independence for Namibia under the United Nations Security Council resolution 435.

Mrs. Chalker: We have had discussions recently with representatives of all the Governments involved in the United States-led negotiations for Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola and independence for Namibia. We are also in touch on a continuing basis with the UN Secretariat.

71. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding recent developments in the peace process in Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: We have lent our full support to the United States-led negotiations. We warmly welcome the recent agreement on a timetable for Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. We urge the parties to move forward quickly to implementation of the UN plan for Namibian independence.

Chile

17. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet representatives of the Government of Chile.

98. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet representatives of the Government of Chile.

Mr. Eggar: Neither my right hon. and learned Friend nor I have current plans to meet representatives of the Government of Chile. I met the Chilean Foreign Minister in Quito on 11 August. We have regular contact at official and ministerial level with the Chilean ambassador.

35. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Chile concerning the continued imprisonment of political prisoners in that country.

64. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the government of Chile concerning the continued imprisonment of political prisoners in that country.

89. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the government of Chile concerning the continued imprisonment of political prisoners in that country.

Mr. Eggar: We take every opportunity in our contacts with the Chilean Government to discuss a wide range of human rights matters. Her Majesty's ambassador in Santiago does so frequently in his own contacts with the Chilean authorities.

Gibraltar

18. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Chief Minister of Gibraltar; and what was discussed.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend last met the Chief Minister of Gibraltar on 12 April. They discussed a wide range of subjects of mutual interest. My right hon. and learned Friend and I expect to see the Chief Minister when he is in London tomorrow.

Drugs (Caribbean)

19. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received concerning the progress of anti-drug campaigns in the Caribbean.

Mr. Eggar: We are working to strengthen the Caribbean's defences against the threat of drugs, in close co-operation with regional Governments and with the Americans. We are providing assistance including training and equipment. I will be discussing progress with regional leaders at the Miami conference later this week.

Human Rights

20. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress he can report from the Vienna review conference and the bilateral human rights talks held with the Soviets in June.

Mr. Waldegrave: On the Vienna review conference I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) earlier today.

The inaugural round of bilateral talks in June was a welcome opportunity for us to press the Russians both on individual cases of concern to us and on the need for fundamental changes to the Soviet system. Progress has been made on a number of individual cases since then, and some legal reforms have been promised. We shall continue to press on both fronts, including at the next round of bilateral talks due early next year.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names of each case listed in his answer to the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst), *Official Report,* 1 November, column 547, and the number allocated to it by the European Commission of Human Rights; and if he will also give the same information for cases relating to article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Mrs. Chalker: The names of, and numbers allocated by the Commission to, the 23 cases listed in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) on 15 November 1988, are as follows. Where the Government are not aware that the applicant has informed the Commission that his or her identity may be disclosed the letter X is used.

Application number	*Applicant's name*	*Date first introduced with Commission by applicant*
9471	X	3 October 1980
11756/85	X	26 October 1982
11209/84, 11234/84, 11266/84 and 11386/85	Brogan, Coyle, McFadden and Tracey	18 October 1984
12009/86	Gunnell	24 April 1985
11787/85	Thynne	3 June 1985
11978/86	Wilson	10 September 1985
12000/86	Weeks	3 October 1985
12084/86	X	30 May 1985
12391/86	Di Stefano	14 October 1985
11932/86	X	5 December 1985
13228/87	X	28 December 1985
13134/87	Costello	17 January 1986
12769/87	Stevens	5 April 1986
12244-5/86 and 12383/86	Fox, Campbell and Hartley	16 June 1986
12816/87	Vearncombe, Herbst Clemens and Speilhagen	10 December 1986
113163-5/87	X	26 August 1987
13321/87	X	12 October 1987
13447-8/87	X	15 December 1987
14038/88	X	8 July 1988

Application number 12323/86 (Campbell), introduced on 5 July 1985, has been declared inadmissable by the Commission.

There are 22 cases pending before the Committee of Ministers, the Court or the Commission, in which the Government have submitted, or have been requested to submit, Observations on Article 8 of the convention.

Number	*Name*	*Date when first introduced with Commission by applicant*	*Subject*
9310/81	Rayner and another	31 December 1980	Noise
9511/81	McCallum	31 August 1981	Prisoner's correspondence
10454/83	Gaskin	17 February 1983	Local authority records
10461/83	Chappell	11 October 1982	Anton Piller order
10622/83	X	13 September 1983	Transsexual

Number	Name	Date when first introduced with Commission by applicant	Subject
10843/84	X	14 February 1984	Transsexual
11095/84	X	16 August 1984	Transsexual
11523/85	Grace	27 March 1985	Prisoner's correspondence
11745/85 and 13595/88	X	30 July 1985 4 January 1988	Interception
11756/85	X	26 October 1982	Corporal punishment
12175/86	X	4 September 1985	Official information
12395/86	Chester	10 March 1986	Prisoner's correspondence
12327/86	X	17 April 1986	Official information
12492/86	X	9 October 1986	Immigration
12687/87	X	10 December 1986	Immigration
12769/87	Stevens	5 April 1986	Prison treatment
12816/87	Vearncombe, Herbst, Clemens and Spielhagen	10 December 1986	Noise
13078/87	X	17 July 1987	Immigration
13134/87	Costello	17 January 1986	Corporal punishment
13228/87	X	28 December 1985	Child care
13590/88	Campbell	5 December 1985	Prisoner's correspondence
13681/88	Hocking	15 March 1988	Local authority records

Council of Ministers

21. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next attend a meeting of the European Community Council of Ministers; and what subjects he expects to discuss.

63. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next attend a meeting of the European Community Council of Ministers; and what subjects he expects to discuss.

91. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next attend a meeting of the European Community Council of Ministers; and what subjects he expects to discuss.

Mrs. Chalker: The next Foreign Affairs Council will be held on 19-20 December. Subjects currently on the agenda are GATT; New Zealand butter and sheepmeat; hormones; EC/EFTA relations; and steel tariffs.

54. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of meetings of the Council of Ministers of the European Community held in November.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) on 24 November for a statement on the Foreign Affairs Council of Ministers. My ministerial colleagues have reported on the outcome of specialist Councils of Ministers on matters which are their responsibility.

Vietnamese Refugees

22. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intends to meet the Government of Vietnam to discuss the problem of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no current plans to do so.

44. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the position of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong.

65. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to reduce the number of Vietnamese refugees accommodated in Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

68. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in relation to the plight of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong.

90. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the position of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong.

Mr. Eggar: There are some 25,000 Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong. Some 15,500 of these have refugee status and are awaiting resettlement overseas. They are gradually being moved into open camps with access to training and employment opportunities which will enhance their resettlement prospects. Since 16 June all new arrivals who meet UNHCR criteria will join those refugees awaiting resettlement. Those who do not qualify as refugees will be held in detention centres pending their eventual return to Vietnam, once internationally acceptable arrangements for this can be agreed with the Vietnamese authorities. We are continuing to take in refugees from Hong Kong at the rate of about 20 per month and urging the other resettlement countries to play their full part.

Kampuchea

23. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives have been taken by the United Nations representatives of the five permanent members of the Security Council towards finding a solution for the problems of Kampuchea.

86. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives have been taken by the United Nations representatives of the five permanent members of the Security Council towards finding a solution for the problems of Kampuchea.

Mr. Eggar: Responsibility for finding a solution to the Cambodian problem rests primarily with those directly involved. However, my right hon. and learned Friend discussed Cambodia with the Foreign Ministers of the four other permanent members of the Security Council when they met during the United Nations General Assembly. We expect informal contacts to continue between our missions in New York.

Southern Africa

24. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the development of a solution to the regional problems in Angola and Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: We have lent our full support to the United States-led negotiations. We warmly welcome the recent agreement on a timetable for Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. We urge the parties to move forward quickly to implementation of the United Nations plan for Namibian independence.

48. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited southern Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: In September my right hon. and learned Friend paid a successful visit to Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Mozambique. He has no present plans for a further visit to the region.

61. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent his Department will be involved in the planning of the Prime Minister's forthcoming visit to the front-line states.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has no plans at present to visit southern Africa.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information relevant to the present United Kingdom policy on relations with South Africa was presented at the 32nd annual conference on the International Atomic Energy Authority in Vienna on 19 to 23 September.

Mr. Eggar: No new information relevant to United Kingdom policy on relations with South Africa was presented at the International Atomic Energy Agency's general conference. The conference passed a resolution resolving to take a decision on the suspension of South Africa from rights and privileges of membership of the agency at its 33rd session in 1989. The United Kingdom opposed the resolution because there is no legal basis under the agency's statute for suspending South Africa and to do so for political reasons would violate the fundamental right of any state to belong to the agencies of its choice.

36. **Mr. John Carlisle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on sanctions against South Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: Our objective remains the replacement of apartheid as soon as possible, through peaceful means, by a non-racial, representative system of government. We do not believe that punitive sanctions against South Africa would help achieve this.

United Nations

25. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what subjects were discussed at recent meetings between Her Majesty's ambassador at the United Nations and the new President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Eggar: No such meeting has yet taken place. However, Dr. Caputo, in his capacity as Chairman of the United Nations General Assembly, has asked to see our permanent representative to the United Nations, Sir Crispin Tickell. This invitation has been accepted but no date has yet been fixed.

108. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when next he plans to meet the Secretary General of the United Nations; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no immediate plans to do so.

Soviet Union

26. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the Foreign Minister of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; and what issues he will be discussing.

Mr. Waldegrave: We expect Mr. Shevardnadze to accompany the Soviet President, Mr. Gorbachev, when he visits the United Kingdom from 12 to 14 December. We shall wish to discuss a wide range of issues, including bilateral matters, human rights, arms control and regional questions.

31. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to visit the Soviet Union.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans.

52. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of Anglo-Soviet relations.

Mr. Waldegrave: Anglo-Soviet relations are in better shape than at any time since 1945. Mr. Gorbachev is to visit Britain in December, when he will be having his fourth round of talks with the Prime Minister. Although fundamental differences between us remain, we are developing an increasingly wide range of worthwhile contacts with the Soviet Union at all levels.

Italy

27. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the Italian Prime Minister.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right and learned Friend the Secretary of State will both attend the European Council at Rhodes on 2-3 December.

Israel

28. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit Israel to discuss the situation in the middle east.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has no plans at present to visit Israel.

El Salvador

29. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of El Salvador regarding the Amnesty International report on human rights abuses in that country; and what further action he proposes to take.

Mr. Eggar: We have not discussed the Amnesty International report with the Government of El Salvador. It is one of a number of recent reports on the human rights situation in El Salvador, including that by the UN special representative. The Government of El Salvador are aware of our long-standing concern about the human rights situation, and we shall continue to raise these concerns whenever appropriate.

39. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from Amnesty International on human rights abuses in El Salvador; and what action Her Majesty's Government are taking in response.

Mr. Eggar: Representatives of Amnesty International met FCO officials on 9 November to discuss the human rights situation in El Salvador. The British Government condemn all abuses of human rights. We are concerned by reports of a recent increase in human rights violation on both sides of the conflict in El Salvador, and we shall continue to raise our concerns with the Salvadorean Government whenever appropriate.

Afghanistan

30. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the suspension of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and continuing atrocities by the Red Army.

Mr. Eggar: We have noted with concern Soviet statements implying that withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan had been suspended. We continue to call for the prompt completion of their withdrawal. We condemn Soviet offensive military operations, including air strikes, which intensify the sufferings of the Afghan people.

33. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to meet the Soviet Foreign Miniter to discuss the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend will be meeting the Soviet Foreign Minister on 13 December. We shall continue to press for the complete and prompt withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

France

32. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met his French counterpart.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend last met M. Dumas at the EC Foreign Affairs Council on 21 November. We last had bilateral talks on 2 November in Paris.

Fiji

34. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on how the new constitution of Fiji will affect United Kingdom-Fiji relations.

Mr. Eggar: The traditionally friendly relations between the United Kingdom and Fiji continue to exist, and we hope that Fiji will soon be able to return to parliamentary democracy under a constitution acceptable to a majority of all the people there.

Africa

37. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the significance of increasing super power co-operation over regional problems in Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We welcome closer co-operation between the United States and the Soviet Union, and recognise the constructive contribution such co-operation has made to the recent progress in the United States-led negotiations on Angola-Namibia.

Señor Jorge Montes

38. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Chilean authorities regarding the arrest and detention of Señor Jorge Montes.

Mr. Eggar: We understand that Señor Montes was released on 18 November and that no charges have been brought against him.

Angola

40. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current peace talks concerning the war in Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: We have lent our full support to the United States-led negotiations. We warmly welcome the recent agreement on a timetable for Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. We urge the parties to move forward quickly to implementation of the United Nations plan for Namibian independence.

62. **Mr. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to why the MPLA Angolan Government have so far ignored Dr. Savimbi's offer of peace, in view of South African military withdrawal.

Mrs. Chalker: It is for the Angolan Government to respond to whatever Mr. Savimbi may have said. We would welcome any moves which led to peace in Angola.

76. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to whether there has been any withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: We are not aware yet of any withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. However, agreement has been reached between the Angolan, Cuban and South

African Governments on a timetable for total Cuban troop withdrawal. We look to the early implementation of this agreement.

88. **Mr. Knowles:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has ascertained from those African leaders most closely involved with bringing about a settlement to the civil war in Angola what terms and conditions are being required by the MPLA Government of Angola in order to negotiate with UNITA.

Mrs. Chalker: We are, of course, in touch with African leaders in the region. It is, however, for the parties concerned to bring the war to an end. We would welcome any move to establish internal peace in Angola which had the support of both sides.

97. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United States Administration, and in particular Dr. Chester Crocker, on the agreement on the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State's speech in the debate on the Address.

Hong Kong

41. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next meet the Governor of Hong Kong; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Eggar: We are in close contact with the Governor of Hong Kong on all aspects of the territory's administration. We meet regularly but at present there are no definite dates for our next meeting.

United States of America

42. **Mr. Bevan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of Anglo-American relations.

Mr. Eggar: Anglo-American relations are in excellent order, as the recent visit to Washington of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister demonstrated.

56. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussion he proposes to hold concerning the foreign policy priorities of the next United States Administration.

99. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he proposes to hold concerning the foreign policy priorities of the next United States Administration.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will be taking an early opportunity to meet his new opposite number, Mr. James Baker.

United Arab Emirates

43. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend has not yet visited the United Arab Emirates, but it is one of the Arabian countries which he will be visiting early next year.

Cyprus

45. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the President of Cyprus; and what issues were discussed.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend last met President Vassiliou of Cyprus when he called on my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 4 October, when we reviewed the progress of the intercommunal talks in Cyprus. My right hon. and learned Friend could not be present at the further discussions with President Vassiliou on 25 November.

Central America

46. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will be sending an observer to the next meeting of the Central American presidents.

Mr. Eggar: No. There has never been any question of foreign observers attending such a meeting.

Palestine National Council

47. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the recent declaration in Algiers by the Palestine National Council; and if he will make a statement.

60. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications of the recent declaration by the Palestine National Council in Algiers for the middle east peace process.

66. **Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Palestine National Council's recent declaration in Algiers.

112. **Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications of the Palestine National Council's recent declaration in Algiers for the peace process in the middle east.

Mr. Waldegrave: The decisions of the Palestine National Council represent modest but potentially important steps towards a peaceful settlement of the Arab/Israel conflict, although we believe that the declaration of a Palestinian state does not help to carry matters forward.

Gulf States

49. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current state of relations between the United Kingdom and the Gulf states.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our relations with the Gulf states are long established and very good.

92. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited the Gulf states.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State last visited some of the Gulf states in January 1986. He will be visiting the area again early next year.

Kurds

50. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received on the current position of the Kurdish population in Iraq and neighbouring countries.

Mr. Waldegrave: The position of the Kurdish people is a matter of continuing concern. We condemned the use of chemical weapons against the Kurdish population in Halabja in March and more recent Iraqi military operations against the Kurdish community.

We have called for an independent investigation of allegations that Iraq has recently used chemical weapons against the Kurds and deplore Iraq's refusal to co-operate.

58. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any proposals to meet representatives of the Kurdish people.

Mr. Waldegrave: Ministers do from time to time meet representatives of the Kurdish people as members of wider delegations. The last occasion was on 21 September when I met a delegation of various interested groups including hon. Members to discuss allegations of use by Iraq of chemical weapons.

Some Kurdish organisations have publicly declared their commitment to overthrow the legitimate Government of Iraq by violent means. It would not be proper for Ministers to receive the representatives of such groups.

93. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Iraqi and Turkish Governments about the treatment of Kurdish refugees.

Mrs. Chalker: We remain in contact with the Turkish Government about the Kurdish refugees. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State informed the hon. Member on 10 November, we have donated £250,000 to the Turkish Red Crescent via the British Red Cross for its Kurdish refugee relief programme.

We have repeatedly called on the Iraqi authorities to respect the human rights of the Kurdish community. We supported the demarche of the Twelve to the Iraqi Government in September, urging the extension of the amnesty granted to Kurdish refugees. We regret that this was rejected.

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what protests Her Majesty's Government has made to the Iraqi authorities over the gaoling of 30,000 Kurds after they attempted to flee the country as a consequence of that Government's campaign against the Kurdish minority.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have repeatedly expressed our concern over the treatment of the Kurdish community in Iraq, and have called on the Government of Iraq to respect their human rights. With other members of the Twelve we called on the Government of Iraq to extend the recent amnesty to members of the Kurdish opposition. We have condemned recent Iraqi military operations against the civilian Kurdish population, and called for an independent international investigation into allegations of use of chemical weapons.

Human Rights Declaration

51. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received asking Her Majesty's Government to mark the 40th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights.

Mr. Eggar: Various non-governmental organisations have made representations about commemorating the 40th anniversary of the universal declaration. There is a great deal of public interest in the occasion. To mark the event the Government intend, amongst other things, to ratify the United Nations torture convention, and to produce a brochure for distribution to schools throughout the country.

In addition, I shall address the special commemoration session at the United Nations on 8 December.

Iran

53. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's relations with Iran.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend agreed with the Iranian Foreign Minister on 30 September in New York that full diplomatic representation would be restored in Tehran and London. Talks between Iranian and British officials on implementing this agreement were concluded on 10 November. Relations between the two countries will be conducted in accordance with the Vienna convention on diplomatic and consular relations, to which both countries are signatories. We hope that this agreement will form the basis for developing a more constructive and businesslike relationship with Iran in the future. A chargé will soon be in place and other staff will follow. We will consider the raising of representational levels from chargé to ambassador in due course.

Lebanon

55. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made to resolve the hostage crisis in the Lebanon.

Mr. Waldegrave: We continue to follow up all possible leads within our policy of refusal to make substantive concessions to hostage-takers. We also continue to make it clear to those states which may have influence over such groups that we consider it their humanitarian responsibility to encourage the release of the hostages.

Qatar

57. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when was his most recent visit to Qatar.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend has not yet had an opportunity to visit Qatar, but hopes to do so in the future.

Turkey

59. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Turkey about torture and human rights.

77. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in the light of Amnesty International's recent report on alleged human rights violations in Turkey, Her Majesty's Government will urge the Turkish Government to take positive steps to prevent torture.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend raised the subject of human rights with the Turkish Foreign Minister during his talks with him in July. More recently, my officials have discussed the issue with the Turkish Foreign Ministry in Ankara and the Turkish embassy here in London. We are assured that allegations contained in the recent Amnesty International report are being investigated by the Turkish Government. We continue to urge the Turkish Government to maintain the improvement in human rights there has been in recent years and to respect and abide by the terms of the United Nations and European conventions against torture, signed and ratified by Turkey earlier this year.

Middle East

67. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to meet the United States Secretary of State-designate to discuss acceptance by the Palestine Liberation Organisation of United Nations resolution 242.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will be taking an early opportunity to meet Mr. Baker, and he looks forward to discussing with him the prospects for progress in the middle east peace process.

82. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any new proposals to establish a middle east peace conference; and if he will make a statement.

102. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest prospects for an international middle east peace conference.

Mr. Waldegrave: We shall continue our efforts to remove the barriers to an international conference on the Arab/Israel dispute. We are encouraged that the Palestine National Council has accepted Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, as the basis for such a conference.

Chemical Weapons

69. **Mr. Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken to procure the compliance of the Government of Iraq with United Nations resolutions in the use of chemical weapons.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have called for an independent investigation under United Nations Security Council resolution 620 into allegations of recent use of chemical weapons by Iraq. We deplore Iraq's refusal to co-operate. We are working for effective multilateral action to prevent future use and proliferation of chemical weapons.

Eastern Europe (Human Rights)

70. **Mr. Hanley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest information he has on the state of human rights in eastern Europe.

Mr. Waldegrave: The human rights situation in the countries of eastern Europe is generally unsatisfactory. The position varies considerably from one country to another. Hungary's record, though not faultless, gives the least cause for concern. In Poland, much progress has been made. In Romania, on the other hand, the authorities' flagrant disregard for human rights shows little sign of improvement, and in Czechoslovakia there have been several serious instances recently of the breaking up of peaceful demonstrations or meetings. Her Majesty's Government will continue to raise serious violations with the countries concerned. There has been little improvement in East Germany or Bulgaria.

Departmental Staff

72. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there are any plans to end separate recruitment for civil servants in his Department.

Mr. Eggar: In common with other Government Departments, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is responsible for its own recruitment at certain levels, mostly in the clerical and secretarial grades. Other recruitment to both the diplomatic and aid wings is carried out on the FCO's behalf by the Civil Service Commission. Entry to the administrative grades of the diplomatic service is through a common scheme of recruitment with the Home Civil Service, in which the same selection procedures apply. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Caribbean (Health Services)

73. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received in relation to the provision of health services in the dependent territories of the Caribbean.

Mr. Eggar: We have received representations from two hon. Members and from the honorary secretary of the International Collaborative Committee on Child Health. We have not received representations from any of the Dependent Territory Governments, which are responsible for health services in the individual territories.

Poland

74. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the state of relations between Her Majesty's Government and Poland.

107. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current state of Anglo-Polish relations.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our relations with Poland have improved over the last few years. The Prime Minister's visit, which was very successful, should put these relations on a firmer and more positive basis; and should lead to increased contacts of all kinds in future.

Rain Forests

75. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to have the issue of preservation of the world's remaining areas of tropical rain forest raised at the United Nations.

Mr. Chris Patten: This important issue is already high on the agenda of the Food and Agriculture Organisation within the United Nations system. We also strongly support the activities of the tropical forestry action plan and the International Tropical Timber Organisation.

GCHQ

78. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many employees or former employees at Government Communications Headquarters have been dismissed, or face disciplinary action, as a result of their trade union membership.

Mr. Waldegrave: On 18 November, the employment of four GCHQ staff who refused to give up their national trade union membership was terminated with compensation on full redundancy terms. On 5 December, the employment of a fifth will be terminated on the same terms. Six GCHQ employees who originally agreed to the new conditions of service, but then rejoined their national unions, are currently undergoing disciplinary proceedings.

Mr. George Samoilovich

79. **Mr. Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will report on the progress which has been made with the case of George Samoilovich of Moscow, who urgently seeks an exit visa for medical treatment in the West.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have raised this repeatedly with the Soviet authorities. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State asked Mr. Shevardnadze to take action on this particularly distressing case when we met in New York in September. He undertook to look into it, but there has been no progress so far. We will continue to press the Russians until there is.

Occupied Territories

80. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has made any recent representations to the Israeli Government concerning the abuse of Palestinian human rights by Israeli troops in the occupied territories.

Mr. Waldegrave: We and our partners in the Twelve have repeatedly urged the Israelis to administer the occupied territories in accordance with international law and human rights standards. We shall continue to do so.

Canada

81. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to visit Canada in the near future.

Mr. Eggar: Yes. I hope to discuss this some time early in the new year with my newly re-elected opposite number.

Single European Act

83. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans to meet M. Jacques Delors to discuss interpretations of the Single European Act.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State expect to meet M. Delors during the European Council meeting in Rhodes on 2-3 December, when a wide range of EC issues will be discussed.

Pakistan (Ambassador)

84. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Pakistan ambassador; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has met the ambassador of Pakistan on a number of occasions. Their discussions have ranged over a variety of issues, including bilateral relations between our two countries, and the problem of Afghanistan.

Bombay High Commission

85. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the current levels of his Department's staff at the British high commission in Bombay; and what were the levels in 1987.

Mr. Eggar: The current number of staff at the British deputy high commission in Bombay is 22 United Kingdom-based and 80 locally engaged. Numbers at the beginning of 1987 were, respectively, 21 and 74.

Western European Union

87. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the next ministerial meeting of the Western European Union will take place.

Mr. Waldegrave: On 3-4 April 1989.

100. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on negotiations leading to the accession of Spain and Portugal to the Western European Union.

Mr. Waldegrave: A protocol for the accession of Spain and Portugal to the modified Brussels treaty was signed at the Western European Union ministerial meeting in London on 14 November.

Sub-Saharan Africa

94. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to make a visit to sub-Saharan Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: In September my right hon. and learned Friend paid a successful visit to Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Mozambique. He has no present plans for a further visit to the region.

Soviet Union (Cultural Agreement)

95. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in implementing the cultural agreement negotiated with the Soviet Union in 1987.

Mr. Waldegrave: Since the memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed in 1987, there has been a considerable increase in the number of bilateral exchanges, both official and unofficial, in the educational, cultural and information fields. A number of protocols have also been signed, for example, on school exchanges and broadcasting, specifically implementing provisions in the MOU.

The first two in the series of annual Anglo-Soviet lectures by distinguished figures have taken place. A Soviet week was held in Birmingham in October this year and a British week is planned in Kiev in 1990.

EC Internal Market

96. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom will continue to refuse to support a social dimension for the internal market of the European Community.

Mrs. Chalker: We will continue to support EC social measures designed to stimulate job creation and reduce unemployment. We shall resist those which would impose excessive regulatory burdens on business and thus run counter to job creation. As EC Heads of Government agreed at Hanover, completion of the single market will help counter the Community's main social problem, unemployment.

Baltic States

101. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received concerning political developments in the Baltic states.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are following developments in the former Baltic states closely and sympathetically. We receive reports on them from a wide range of sources.

111. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom representative at the United Nations meets with the representatives of the Baltic states.

Mr. Waldegrave: The former Baltic states, unlike the Ukraine and Byelorussia, are not separately represented at the United Nations.

Esquipulas II Agreement

103. **Mrs. Wise:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of the United States of America in connection with the progress of the Esquipulas II agreement.

109. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of the United States of America in connection with the progress of the Esquipulas II agreement.

Mr. Eggar: We have regular discussions with the United States Administration on a wide range of issues, including the progress of the Esquipulas II agreement.

Cuba

104. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Cuba.

Mr. Eggar: We have normal diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Mr. Adolpho Calero

105. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date the leader of the Contras, Mr. Adolpho Calero, was received at his Department; and which Ministers and officials he met.

Mr. Eggar: At his own request, Dr. Calero called on the head of Mexico and Central American Department on 10 October. He had no meetings with Ministers.

European Single Market

106. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further meetings he intends to hold with European Economic Community Ministers with regard to the establishment of the single market in 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We have frequent meetings on EC affairs, including the single market, with our opposite numbers in other member states. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State regularly takes the opportunity of stressing the importance we attach to opening up the European market in 1992.

EFTA-EC Relations

110. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about European Economic Community-European Free Trade Association relations.

Mrs. Chalker: EC/EFTA relations are excellent. Collectively the EC and EFTA are each other's most important trading partners. We fully support the efforts being made to build on the solid base of the EC's free trade agreements with individual EFTA states to develop and extend EC/EFTA relations further, in parallel with the completion of the single market.

I had a most useful meeting on the issues with EFTA ambassadors yesterday.

Arms Control

113. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policy initiatives his Department intends to pursue to meet the arms control objectives set out in the Gracious Speech.

Mr. Waldegrave: Together with other members of the Western Alliance we shall continue to work for the full range of arms control objectives set out in the Gracious Speech. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to one recent policy initiative—the presentation by the NATO Allies last week of facts and figures on the balance of conventional forces in Europe. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Falklands

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current talks with Argentina on the future of the Falklands.

Mr. Eggar: There are no "direct talks" with Argentina on the future of the Falklands. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State explained to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), the Argentine Foreign Minister, who is currently Chairman of the United Nations General Assembly, has asked to see our permanent representative to the United Nations, Sir Crispin Tickell.

South Georgia

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to extend the territorial limits of South Georgia and declare an exclusive economic zone.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has at present no plans to do so. Waters around South Georgia are subject to the provisions of the convention for the conservation of Antarctic marine living resources, in which we play an active role. The renewable resources assessment group at Imperial college is studying the fishery resources of the area on behalf of the South Georgia Government.

Exit Visas

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise with Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Shevardnadze the cases of Uri Chernyak and Boris Livshitz, both waiting 10 years for an exist visa.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes.

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in the light of the deliberate extermination of black Sudanese Christians and the enslavement of their children in the Muslim North, Her Majesty's Government has taken steps to ensure that the Sudanese Government desists from such policies.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have told the Sudanese authorities on a number of occasions of our deep concern at reported atrocities and human rights abuses in Sudan.

Algeria (Riots)

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government has made to the Algerian authorities in the aftermath of their crushing of civilian riots in October.

Mr. Waldegrave: This was one of the subjects discussed when the Algerian ambassador paid his introductory calls in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 12 October.

Refusniks

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise with the Soviet authorities the situation of second generation refusniks, Alex Lein and Dima Chernyak.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes.

Visa Applications

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number of visa applications made at each High Commission from 1985 to 30 June 1988 and the number of refusals in each case.

Mr. Eggar: The number of applications made are not available.

The numbers of entry clearances for the United Kingdom issued at high commissions in 1985, 1986 and 1987 are as listed. The numbers of refusals are available only for 1987. Statistics for 1988 are not yet available.

	1985		*1986*		*1987*	
	Issues	*Refusals*	*Issues*	*Refusals*	*Issues*	*Refusals*
Canberra, Australia	4,284	n/a	4,773	n/a	5,685	27
Brisbane	2,185	n/a	2,038	n/a	1,620	2
Melbourne	4,385	n/a	5,037	n/a	3,762	—
Perth	1,708	n/a	1,771	n/a	2,142	11
Sydney	6,959	n/a	4,946	n/a	1,115	5
Nassau, Bahamas	527	n/a	400	n/a	290	—
Dhaka, Bangladesh	8,139	n/a	6,752	n/a	11,197	5,145
Bridgetown, Barbados	4,222	n/a	3,239	n/a	2,716	130
Belmopan, Belize	187	n/a	363	n/a	139	—
Gabarone	442	n/a	550	n/a	652	—
Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei	2,693	n/a	2,183	n/a	1,965	3
Ottowa, Canada	4,536	n/a	6,415	n/a	8,093	—
Edmonton	449	n/a	468	n/a	467	—
Montreal	315	n/a	169	n/a	285	—
Toronto	715	n/a	1,074	n/a	1,064	1
Vancouver	572	n/a	533	n/a	265	—
Nicosia, Cyprus	9,629	n/a	8,141	n/a	7,820	306
Suva, Fiji	860	n/a	757	n/a	592	51
Banjul, Gambia	1,137	n/a	1,139	n/a	1,165	22
Accra, Ghana	1,382	n/a	4,165	n/a	9,198	2,250
Georgetown, Guyana	1,954	n/a	3,159	n/a	1,487	99
New Delhi, India	1,895	n/a	9,607	n/a	38,306	4,247
Bombay	4,046	n/a	25,728	n/a	42,649	1,040
Calcutta	1,283	n/a	2,556	n/a	7,872	102
Madras	n/a	n/a	1,463	n/a	9,428	218
Kingston, Jamaica	4,064	n/a	4,221	n/a	3,166	706
Nairobi, Kenya	4,355	n/a	3,302	n/a	3,106	83
Lilongwe, Malawi	419	n/a	300	n/a	500	3
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	9,275	n/a	9,371	n/a	9,174	232
Valletta, Malta	1,196	n/a	1,056	n/a	1,255	26
Port Louis, Mauritius	4,375	n/a	2,751	n/a	2,762	237
Auckland, New Zealand	9,516	n/a	6,029	n/a	4,061	n/a
Lagos, Nigeria	7,491	n/a	9,388	n/a	42,920	3,545
Kaduna	2,235	n/a	6,280	n/a	8,940	549
Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea	387	n/a	399	n/a	403	1
Singapore	10,885	n/a	8,637	n/a	9,695	13
Victoria, Seychelles	528	n/a	152	n/a	161	2
Freetown, Sierra Leone	3,076	n/a	2,849	n/a	2,520	118
Honiara, Solomon Islands	85	n/a	61	n/a	98	—
Colombo, Sri Lanka	7,153	n/a	8,103	n/a	7,488	860
Mbabane, Swaziland	36	n/a	34	n/a	48	—
Dae es Salaam, Tanzania	2,196	n/a	1,980	n/a	1,693	50
Nuku'alofa, Tonga	19	n/a	32	n/a	17	—
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago	4,535	n/a	2,891	n/a	2,489	92
Kampala, Uganda	571	n/a	543	n/a	596	11
Vila, Vanuatu	81	n/a	30	n/a	79	—
Lusaka, Zambia	1,756	n/a	1,120	n/a	1,847	4
Harare, Zimbabwe	320	n/a	518	n/a	726	34

n/a = not available.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on initiatives currently planned by Her Majesty's Government in preparation for the 1990 nuclear non-proliferation treaty review conference.

Mr. Waldegrave: We intend to play an active role in the 1990 review conference of the non-proliferation treaty and in the preparations for it. With our co-depositary powers and other parties to the treaty we co-sponsored the United Nations resolution notifying the Secretary-General that the conference will take place. The parties have established a preparatory committee for the conference and we are in the process of discussing practical arrangements with other treaty partners.

We have informed the United Nations Secretariat that the United Kingdom is prepared to make an advance payment in the first quarter of 1989 of £100,000, a sum equivalent to virtually the whole of the estimated final proportion of the costs of the conference to be borne by this country. We have appealed to other parties to the treaty to consider making similar advance payments.

Nuclear Safeguards

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any request has been received by his Department to submit evidence on the implementation of nuclear safeguards in the European Economic Community before the Bundestag special inquiry commission on nuclear materials oversight, held in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to arrange a meeting with the European proliferation information centre to discuss and evaluate recent reports and publications asserting problems in international nuclear safeguards implementation.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Entry Applications

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each country *(a)* the number of applications for entry to the United Kingdom *(b)* the number of refusals and *(c)* the number of appeals made (i) successfully and (ii) unsuccessfully in each of the last two years.

Mr. Eggar: Figures relating to entry clearances issued for 1986 and 1987 are as follows. Numbers of total applications made are not available. Statistics of applicants refused in individual countries have been kept only since January 1987. Details of appeals are not recorded centrally by individual nationality in all cases but Commands 166 and 415, "Control of Immigration Statistics," at table 5, give a limited breakdown of the numbers of appeals allowed, dismissed and withdrawn for the years 1986 and 1987 respectively.

	1986		*1987*	
	Issues	*Refusals*	*Issues*	*Refusals*
Afghanistan	150	n/a	206	1
Algeria	821	n/a	966	43
Angola	725	n/a	811	2
Argentina	36,067	n/a	17,130	2
Australia	15,316	n/a	10,232	45
Austria	1,815	n/a	2,632	7
Bahamas	397	n/a	290	Nil
Bahrain	2,560	n/a	4,389	n/a
Bangladesh	6,551	n/a	10,988	5,145
Barbados	3,120	n/a	2,699	130
Belgium	3,090	n/a	2,875	65
Belize	382	n/a	128	Nil
Bolina	29	n/a	27	2
Botswana	528	n/a	634	Nil
Brazil	1,000	n/a	9[illegible]7	2
Brunei	1,287	n/a	1,212	3
Bulgaria	3,523	n/a	4,180	6
Burma	505	n/a	645	3
Cameroon	2,538	n/a	2,221	n/a
Canada	6,854	n/a	8,322	10
Chile	173	n/a	208	1
China	8,375	n/a	9,592	34
Colombia	718	n/a	785	11
Congo	143	n/a	104	Nil
Costa Rica	103	n/a	119	1
Cote D'Ivoire	524	n/a	450	49
Cuba	567	n/a	473	n/a
Cyprus	8,141	n/a	7,781	306
Czechoslovakia	6,638	n/a	11,339	Nil
Denmark	826	n/a	1,417	31
Ecuador	65	n/a	91	Nil
Egypt	29,460	n/a	25,500	607
El Salvador	—	n/a	—	—
Ethiopia	3,683	n/a	4,069	30
Fiji	648	n/a	479	51
Finland	380	n/a	467	Nil
France	14,211	n/a	11,573	67
Gabon	463	n/a	390	Nil
The Gambia	1,117	n/a	1,125	22
Germany (FRG)	4,563	n/a	8,564	94
Germany (DGR)	2,582	n/a	3,850	Nil
Ghana	4,076	n/a	9,115	2,250
Greece	1,325	n/a	1,395	63
Guatemala	n/a	n/a	n/a	—
Guyana	2,578	n/a	1,465	99
Holy See	34	n/a	20	17
Honduras	16	n/a	29	5
Hong Kong	33,201	n/a	49,153	202
Hungary	16,641	n/a	16,303	3
Iceland	77	n/a	128	Nil
India	38,788	n/a	97,871	4,567
Indonesia	11,862	n/a	10,363	49
Iran	10,570	n/a	n/a	—
Iraq	5,452	n/a	3,370	17
Ireland	1,287	n/a	1,700	8
Israel	1,341	n/a	1,209	1
Italy	3,049	n/a	1,661	23
Jamaica	4,183	n/a	3,089	706
Japan	2,457	n/a	3,452	6
Jerusalem	1,600	n/a	1,825	Nil
Jordan	12,904	n/a	11,655	43
Kenya	3,262	n/a	3,064	83
Korea (South)	542	n/a	358	1
Kuwait	10,068	n/a	11,646	49
Lebanon	3,046	n/a	5,642	Nil
Lesotho	58	n/a	40	2
Liberia	1,441	n/a	2,035	24
Libya	307	n/a	704	1
Luxembourg	235	n/a	256	Nil
Madagascar	227	n/a	345	n/a
Malawi	294	n/a	490	3
Malaysia	5,045	n/a	4,392	232
Malta	1,031	n/a	1,227	26
Mauritius	2,526	n/a	2,429	237
Mexico	717	n/a	540	Nil
Mongolia	18	n/a	18	Nil
Morocco	576	n/a	450	6
Mozambique	377	n/a	433	Nil
Nepal	991	n/a	1,091	20
Netherlands	2,893	n/a	3,991	3
New Zealand	6,033	n/a	3,693	n/a
Nigeria	15,338	n/a	51,665	4,094
Norway	1,006	n/a	2,225	34
Oman	6,771	n/a	8,506	Nil
Pakistan	16,253	n/a	53,226	8,897
Panama	25	n/a	118	5
Papua New Guinea	288	n/a	320	1
Peru	216	n/a	248	5
Phillipines	7,454	n/a	10,210	476
Poland	31,665	n/a	33,751	333
Portugal	608	n/a	726	30
Qatar	4,009	n/a	4,300	26
Romania	3,966	n/a	4,100	3
Saudi Arabia	43,365	n/a	40,265	220
Senegal	845	n/a	869	Nil
Seychelles	121	n/a	131	2
Sierra Leone	2,808	n/a	2,511	118
Singapore	2,715	n/a	3,192	13
Solomon Islands	41	n/a	56	Nil
Somalia	448	n/a	538	37
South Africa	1,436	n/a	1,573	5
Soviet Union	12,404	n/a	14,108	Nil
Spain	4,070	n/a	3,050	13
Sri Lanka	7,870	n/a	7,082	860
Sudan	9,273	n/a	10,080	10
Swaziland	30	n/a	40	Nil
Sweden	2,250	n/a	3,359	7
Switzerland	5,040	n/a	7,733	63
Syria	2,560	n/a	68	1
Tanzania	1,968	n/a	1,670	50
Thailand	10,491	n/a	16,390	n/a
Tonga	29	n/a	15	Nil
Trinidad and Tobago	2,859	n/a	2,468	92
Tunisia	667	n/a	300	1
Turkey	1,469	n/a	1,588	84
Uganda	537	n/a	580	11
United Arab Emirates	15,585	n/a	14,938	96
United States	30,156	n/a	41,616	126
Uruguay	102	n/a	133	Nil
Vanuatu	10	n/a	50	Nil
Venezuela	225	n/a	215	1
Vietnam	42	n/a	42	2
Yemen Arab Republic	2,786	n/a	409	1
People's Democratic Republic of Yemen	406	n/a	464	n/a
Yugoslavia	326	n/a	409	30
Zaire	567	n/a	806	Nil
Zambia	1,109	n/a	834	4
Zimbabwe	500	n/a	707	34

Table 5

Appeals to immigration adjudicators—1987
Number of appellants

	Nationality of appellants																	
	Bangladesh			*India*			*Pakistan*			*European Community*			*Other nationalities*			*All nationalities*		
Appeal category	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*
Exclusion																		
Appeal at port	12	44	4	3	15	8	—	11	22	—	3	5	14	51	65	29	124	104
External appeal	4	52	14	3	45	15	7	46	36	3	32	3	48	510	85	65	685	153
Refusal of certificate of entitlement	5	19	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	20	7	9	39	9
Refusal of entry clearance for:																		
Temporary purposes	29	123	34	23	45	24	36	93	30	—	2	—	281	763	201	369	1,026	289
Employment, business or independent means	—	10	1	2	12	9	—	3	2	—	2	—	7	26	24	9	53	36
Wives, children and persons for immediate settlement	607	1,204	253	23	99	29	148	299	75	—	—	—	56	226	78	834	1,828	435
Female fiancées	1	—	—	4	4	13	3	8	3	—	—	—	7	25	8	15	37	24
Husbands	14	16	2	33	92	16	47	51	12	—	1	—	12	11	7	106	171	37
Male fiancés	3	3	2	90	202	97	181	203	61	—	—	—	5	16	3	279	424	163
Variation of landing conditions	—	—	—	2	4	31	1	4	7	—	2	1	20	37	99	23	47	138
Refusal to vary leave to enter	6	71	36	31	173	105	19	137	116	—	22	27	143	1,131	1,071	199	1,534	1,355
Decision to make a deportation order	1	7	1	5	22	3	6	19	4	—	2	3	27	149	69	39	199	80
Refusal to revoke a deportation order	—	—	—	—	2	2	—	2	1	—	1	—	3	25	4	3	30	7
Giving of removal directions	—	—	—	1	3	2	—	5	—	—	1	—	2	39	18	3	48	20
Destination only	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	2	2	—	3	1	—	18	8	—	24	11
All appeals	682	1,549	347	220	719	356	448	883	371	3	71	40	629	3,047	1,747	1,982	6,269	2,861

Table 5

Appeals to immigration adjudicators—1986
Number of appellants

	Nationality of appellants																	
	Bangladesh			*India*			*Pakistan*			*European Community*			*Other nationalities*			*All nationalities*		
Appeal category	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*
Exclusion																		
Appeal at port	1	22	3	1	—	1	—	3	3	—	—	—	5	41	26	7	66	33
External appeal	2	46	7	2	36	10	12	44	7	2	28	8	37	434	61	55	588	93
Refusal of certificate of entitlement	—	10	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	8	9	1	19	9
Refusal of entry clearance for:																		
Temporary purposes	30	88	13	23	45	14	7	20	3	—	—	1	248	594	183	308	747	214
Employment, business or independent means	1	1	2	1	5	1	1	6	1	1	3	1	6	34	24	10	49	29
Wives, children and persons for immediate settlement	886	1,697	291	64	113	49	307	527	175	1	2	1	73	227	120	1,331	2,566	636
Female fiancées	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	8	2	3	9
Husbands	18	13	1	36	85	19	36	42	15	—	1	—	3	13	4	93	154	39
Male fiancés	1	1	1	89	197	60	148	202	58	—	—	1	3	13	5	241	413	125
Variation of landing conditions	—	4	—	—	19	3	—	3	6	—	16	2	12	87	95	12	129	106
Refusal to vary leave to enter	6	48	34	18	196	120	30	141	120	2	35	35	189	1,341	1,289	245	1,761	1,598
Decision to make a deportation order	1	3	—	1	32	8	1	17	4	—	1	5	23	187	78	26	240	95
Refusal to revoke a deportation order	—	1	—	—	3	—	1	1	1	—	2	—	2	28	3	3	35	4
Giving of removal directions	1	3	—	—	4	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	26	5	1	35	5
Destination only	—	1	—	—	4	1	—	4	—	—	1	—	—	52	19	—	62	20
All appeals	947	1,938	353	235	740	286	544	1,012	393	6	89	54	603	3,088	1,929	2,335	6,867	3,015

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mr. Eggar: I refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply on Tuesday 29 November *at column* 178. My Department has no plans to seek removal of Crown immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations.

Political Prisoners (Iran)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Iran concerning the recent spate of executions of political prisoners.

Mr. Waldegrave: The reports of executions are a matter of concern to the Government. We have consistently condemned such violations of human rights in Iran. We look to the Iranian authorities to co-operate with the United Nations special representative so that he can investigate these and other allegations of human rights abuses.

Pakistan Foreign Minister

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to meet the new Foreign Minister of Pakistan.

Mr. Eggar: When a new Foreign Minister of Pakistan is appointed, my right hon. and learned Friend hopes to have an early opportunity to meet him or her.

Environment (International Action)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote and co-ordinate international action to conserve the environment.

Mr. Eggar: We are in close touch with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment who has the primary responsibility for international action on environmental issues.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 1 December 1988

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Turkey (Kurdish Refugees)

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid has been provided by Her Majesty's Government to Turkey to assist in dealing with Kurdish refugees from Iraq.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 25 November, at column *14*.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk

11. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has received representations from consumer organisations about the future of milk production in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: From time to time I receive representations from consumers organisations on a wide range of subjects. For example, my right hon. Friend the Minister recently met the National Consumer Council to discuss its views on a range of agricultural issues.

Food Poisoning

12. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new measures he is proposing to reduce food poisoning.

Mr. Ryder: The Government have a long established system for reducing food poisoning. This involves a close working relationship between several Government Departments, and in particular close links between the Department of Health and ourselves.

For example, the State Veterinary Service monitors infections in animals. Controls are designed to cure the spread of infection in animals, animal products and animal protein used in feeding-stuffs. And detailed statutory requirements exist for the hygienic production of meat.

Early in the new year, we plan to launch, with the Department of Health, a major national campaign aimed at reminding, and educating, the public about the importance of maintaining good food hygiene practices to prevent food poisoning.

Wool Board

13. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response he has received to his statement that the British Wool Marketing Board will remain in its present form.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My right hon. Friend and I have received a favourable response from the farming industry, and from the board itself, to the continued operation of the British Wool Marketing Board.

50. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response he has received from the National Farmers Union and the chairman of the Wool Board to his recent statement on the British Wool Marketing Board's future role.

Mr. MacGregor: The president of the National Farmers Union and the chairman of the British Wool Marketing Board have both welcomed the continued operation of the statutory marketing arrangements for wool.

Set-aside Scheme

14. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to ensure that the rules contained within the set-aside scheme will protect the local environment.

Mr. Ryder: In framing the rules of the scheme, my right hon. Friends and I took full account of the need to ensure that set-aside took full account of the environment. The detailed rules for the management of fallow land are outlined in the scheme documents, which also give advice on how set-aside can be used to maintain and improve environmental features such as hedgerows, shelterbelts and bridleways.

23. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the latest figures on registration for the set-aside scheme.

Mr. MacGregor: About 2,000 farmers in the United Kingdom have applied for set-aside, representing about 150,000 acres of land to be taken out of arable production in this crop year. About 24,000 further farmers have registered their arable land so that they are in a position to apply for set-aside in the future without needing independent evidence of their 1987-88 cropping pattern.

59. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to make the set-aside scheme compulsory.

Mr. Ryder: No.

55. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make a statement on the progress of the set-aside scheme.

61. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the take-up so far of his Department's set-aside policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Member to the answer that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens).

Potatoes

15. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to impose regulations governing the maximum residue level of pesticides, fungicides and sprout inhibitors allowable in potatoes, in line with United Nations regulations.

Mr. Ryder: The Government have introduced statutory residue limits for potatoes under the Pesticides (Maximum Levels in Food) Regulations for 36 pesticide active ingredients covering all the main classes of pesticide use. There are a limited number of recommendations in this field from the Codex Alimentarius Commission, but no United Nations regulations.

Forestry Commission

16. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Forestry Commission; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. MacGregor: I meet the chairman of the Forestry Commission regularly. No meeting is planned for the immediate future.

Transport and General Workers' Union

17. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to meet representatives of the agricultural and allied workers trade group of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

Mr. Ryder: I have no plans to do so at present.

Countryside Commission

18. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Countryside Commission; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Ryder: I met the chairman of the Countryside Commission on 7 November when we discussed many issues of concern to the countryside. I have no immediate plans for another meeting but remain ready to discuss with him any matters of mutual concern.

"Farmers Guide to the Planning System"

19. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department's document "The Farmers Guide to the Planning System" will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that this guide, which my Department is preparing in association with the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office, will be published in January.

British Veterinary Association

20. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any plans to meet the British Veterinary Association.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have no plans to meet the BVA at present but my officials are in frequent contact with it.

Common Agricultural Policy

21. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated cost to Britain of the common agricultural policy in 1989-90.

Mr. MacGregor: The latest forecast of public expenditure in the United Kingdom under the common agricultural policy in 1989-90 is £1,467 million. This covers all expenditure under Community market support and structural aid schemes for agriculture and fisheries but excludes related expenditure such as disease prevention, advice, research and development, land drainage and administration.

The United Kingdom Government also support spending under the common agricultural policy elsewhere in the Community through our net contribution to the European Community budget, which in 1989-90 is estimated at £1,970 million. Over that period it is expected that more than 60 per cent. of the European Community budget will be spent on the common agricultural policy.

33. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next plans to meet other European Community Agriculture Ministers to discuss the common agricultural policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I expect to meet other Agriculture Ministers in the Council of Ministers in the Council starting on 12 December.

37. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives he plans to take to implement the proposals for the reform of the common agricultural policy as outlined in the Gracious Speech; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I am consistently endeavouring to ensure that the reforms established by the European Council in February and the price negotiations in July are carried out and to maintain the impetus at all appropriate times

53. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will indicate the positive results achieved by reforms of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. MacGregor: European Community stocks of most commodities have fallen significantly. Butter stocks are down 80 per cent. over the last year and skimmed milk powder stocks virtually eliminated. Stabilisers are cutting support levels, where production has exceeded the agreed threshold for cereals, oilseeds, olive oil, protein crops, cotton and sheep. The common agricultural policy is being effectively managed, within the guidelines, under the new budgetary discipline rules.

Monetary Compensatory Amounts

22. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made by the European Community towards the abolition of monetary compensatory amounts by 1992.

Mr. MacGregor: The United Kingdom has made it clear that we regard it as essential to abolish monetary gaps by 1992 if we are to achieve the benefits of a single market in agriculture. With this objective, the Council with our strong support and pressure in 1987 agreed to a mechanism to dismantle newly-created monetary gaps in stages following each EMS realignment; and in July 1988 that the existing fixed monetary gaps should be eliminated in four stages by 1992. The Commission is to report on how to remove variable monetary gaps and solve the other transitional problems which will arise.

Agricultural Budget (EC)

24. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reduction in the spending of the European Community has arisen from savings on the agricultural budget as a result of decisions by the European Council in or since December 1986.

Mr. MacGregor: Decisions taken in December 1986 and since to reduce Community spending on agriculture have been estimated by the Commission to have saved about 2·7 becu, or about £1,840 million by the end of 1988.

Beans

25. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the latest estimates for the amount of beans harvested in 1988.

Mr. Ryder: Our estimate of the 1988 United Kingdom field bean crop, passed to the Commission in late August for purposes of forecasting Community production, was 512,000 tonnes. Latest trade estimates suggest that production may be higher than this.

An official estimate of the United Kingdom crop will be given in "Agriculture in the UK 1988" to be published early in the new year.

Animal Foodstuffs (Chemicals)

26. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what monitoring takes place of requests by individual farmers for animal food suppliers to add chemical substances to animal foodstuffs.

Mr. Donald Thompson: All sales of animal feedingstuffs have to meet the requirements of the Feedingstuffs Regulations 1988. Where medicinal substances have been used, the feed must also comply with the Medicine (Medicated Animal Feedingstuffs) Regulations 1988. Samples of feedingstuffs are taken by trading standards officers for analysis. In the case of medicinal substances, there is also enforcement of the controls by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain.

Fisheries (Devon and Cornwall)

27. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the Devon and Cornwall fisheries development group with regard to the Cornish fishing industry past 1992.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I visited the group in Plymouth on 9 November. We had a full presentation and stimulating discussions of its plans and aims for the future.

Nitrates

28. **Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what effect the proposed restrictions to deal with the problem of nitrates will have on farmers; and if he will make a statement.

29. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what effect the Government's response to the problem of high nitrates levels in water will have on farming practices.

30. **Mr. McCrindle:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how farmers will be compensated for loss of crop yield if they reduce the use of nitrate-based fertilisers.

68. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposals to further restrict the use of nitrogen fertilisers in British agriculture.

69. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further action he proposes to take to help farmers deal with the problems caused by nitrogen leaching from the soil.

Mr. Ryder: I refer my hon. Friends and the hon. Member to the reply given on 24 November to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris).

Research and Development

31. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future funding of agricultural research and development expenditure.

Mr. Ryder: My Department's examination of its research and development programme took place against the objectives outlined in the July 1987 White Paper on civil research and development (Cm 185) and the Government's view that research which offers the prospect of commercial application or exploitation within a reasonable time scale is appropriate for funding by the industry. As announced in the Autumn Statement, funding for near market R and D has been reduced by £5 million for 1990-91 and £14 million for 1991-92. Together with the reduction announced last year this is equivalent to a reduction in 1991-92 of £30 million at full economic cost. Final decisions on the future level of Government funding will not be made until after consultations with industry have been completed.

54. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the agricultural industry about the future of research and development in agriculture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Following earlier discussions I had with the industry, my noble friend the Parliamentary Secretary has held meetings with all sectors of the agricultural horticultural and food industries to discuss the fututre funding of near market research and development following the completion of the Barnes review. More detailed consultations with the industry have taken place with officials from my Department. Industry organisations were asked to give their considered response by the end of October and these are now being studied.

56. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the likely future contributions of the agricultural industry towards research and development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: No such assessment has yet been made. We are currently examining industry's considered responses and consultations are continuing.

Waste

32. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review the grant system to upland-lowland farmers for waste handling facilities.

Mr. MacGregor: As I announced on 28 November a major feature of the new capital grant scheme that I hope to introduce in February will be improved aid for waste storage, treatment and disposal. We have made provision of up to £50 million over the next three years to allow for improved lowland grant rates and for the extension of eligibility to include fixed disposal piping and safety fencing.

Cereals

34. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the 1988 United Kingdom cereals harvest.

Mr. Ryder: My Department currently estimates the 1988 cereals harvest in the United Kingdom to be 21·0 million tonnes.

48. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the latest estimates for the 1988 cereal harvest.

Mr. Ryder: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh).

Sheepmeat

35. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on what progress has been made in the European sheepmeat regime negotiations.

42. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any plans to review the operation of the sheepmeat regime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Country Landowners Association

36. **Mr. Ashby:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the president of the Country Landowners Association; and what was discussed.

Mr. Ryder: I last met the president of the Country Landowners Association on 4 November when I spoke at the CLA conference on set-aside. We discussed set-aside.

Milk Marketing Board

38. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he is next due to meet the chairman of the Milk Marketing Board to discuss the dairy sector.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to meet with the chairman of the Milk Marketing Board; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My right hon. Friend the Minister and I have regular contacts with the chairman of the Milk Marketing Board to discuss various issues affecting the dairy industry.

Marine Mammals

39. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any proposals to monitor the incidental capture of marine mammals by commercial fishing vessels; and if he will make a statement.

57. **Mr. McLeish:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has recently held discussions with fishermen's organisations regarding the phenomenon of the incidental capture of marine mammals.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion).

Sheep Premium

40. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with European Community agriculture Ministers about the future of the sheep variable premium scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Council of Ministers (Agriculture) has twice considered the proposals for a review of the sheepmeat regime tabled by the European Commission. These proposals include one to phase out the variable premium. Negotiations are as yet at an early stage.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

41. **Mr. Hicks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will increase the level of compensation to 100 per cent. for confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy affected cattle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I believe that the existing compensation rate of 50 per cent. of market value is fair, given that the animals are suffering from a terminal illness but are valued as if unaffected by the disease.

66. **Mr. George Howarth** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy have been identified to date; in which counties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 28 November and which appears in the *Official Report* at columns *97-98*.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline the procedures for the disposal of carcases of cows infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The disposal of carcases of cattle suspected of being affected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy is the responsibility of the Ministry's State Veterinary Service. It ensures that transportation, which is prohibited except under licence, and incineration or burial is carried out in accordance with strict animal health conditions.

Employment

43. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has assessed the implications of his agricultural policies on employment in the countryside; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The encouragement of rural employment is one of the main features of the Government's strategy for the countryside. Within that strategy, the aim of our agricultural policies is to assist the farming industry to adapt to changing market forces, while encouraging farmers to develop new initiatives which should provide opportunities for rural employment.

Bovine Somatatropin

44. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline his plans for the future of research into bovine somatatropin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My Department's programmes of research are kept under continuous review and this includes the need for research into bovine somatotropin, particularly in respect of public interest issues such as animal welfare.

Most research into bovine somatotropin is undertaken or commissioned by the veterinary pharmaceutical industry. My Department has been funding a small study on dairy cow nutrition in which bovine somatotropin has featured and this is part of the work offered for industry funding following the review of near market R and D.

Small Farmers Association

45. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will next be meeting representatives of the Small Farmers Association; and what he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Ryder: I have no specific plans to do so at present, though I have frequent contact with all sections of the farming community.

Torrey Research Centre

46. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he plans to visit the Torrey research centre in Aberdeen in the near future.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My right hon. Friend has no plans to visit Torrey research station in the near future. I visited it in August with the hon. Members for Aberdeen South (Mr. Doran) and for South Shields (Dr. Clark).

Pesticides

47. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline his plans for the future of pesticides research; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The crop protection R and D commission, upon which my Department spent around £8 million in 1987-88, is under review at present. The research consultative committee's report on invertebrate pests, diseases and weeds in growing crops was published in May 1987 and a report on the protection of stored and growing crops is expected to be published around the end of this year. Much of the work is of a public good nature and thus unlikely to be significantly affected by the current review of near market research.

Research Budget

49. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement in the cut of £31·5 million in the agricultural research budget.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker).

Sheep

51. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the farming unions to discuss the support system for the sheep industry.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I continue to maintain regular contacts with the farming unions and their representatives on matters relating to the sheep sector.

Green Pound

52. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to press for further devaluation of the green pound.

Mr. McGregor: The Council and Commission have now agreed that monetary gaps should be phased out as part of the completion of the internal market, an objective that United Kingdom Ministers have persistently pressed for. The next step in this process is likely to be decided in the 1989 price fixing.

EC (Discussions)

58. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next plans to meet his European Economic Community counterparts; and what issues he will be discussing.

Mr. McGregor: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given today to the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith).

Tributyltin (Fish)

60. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is in a position to assess the reduction of concentrations of tributyltin in fish in inshore waters following the ban of the sale and use of this anti-foulant in 1987.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Over the last year, levels of tributyltin in shellfish have fallen by more than two-thirds in the Crouch estuary and by over half in other estuaries monitored in England. Juvenile oysters are already showing good growth in these waters and new growth is also clearly detectable in oysters previously affected in the Crouch.

Expenditure

62. **Mr. Marland:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the savings on planned expenditure outlined in the Autumn Statement will benefit farmers, taxpayers and consumers.

Mr. MacGregor: The Autumn Statement shows savings over previous plans for agriculture of £1,080 million during the three years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91. These stem partly from external factors, such as the United States drought which reduced the cost of export subsidies, and partly from internal economies following recent wide-ranging reforms to the common agricultural policy.

I have always said that a common agricultural policy that was running the risk of being out of control was not in the interest of farmers and was no balance for future stability in agriculture. These reforms have brought the European Community budget under control and led to a significant reduction in the level of intervened stocks which were overhanging Community and world markets and depressing prices. Therefore farmers now have a firmer and more stable base for planning their future.

Taxpayers—including farmers—will benefit from these savings because they have improved the value for money of Government spending and have helped the Government to increase the provision for priority programmes while keeping public expenditure as a proportion of national income on a declining trend. They also enhance the scope for reducing taxation when it is prudent to do so.

These savings in themselves will not have any marked impact on consumers.

Greenhouse Effect

63. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will indicate the level by which the seas around Britain could rise if nothing is done about the greenhouse effect; and what effect this would have on the adequacy of the United Kingdom's sea defences.

Mr. Ryder: There are a wide range of predictions about the rise in mean sea level that could take place, but given the many uncertainties it is not realistic to make firm assessments of the implications for our sea defences.

We are monitoring the position carefully and will take account of the results of current research programmes as they become available.

Fisheries Ministers

64. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last attended a meeting of the European Community's Fisheries Ministers council; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on 29 November.

Women's Farmers Union

65. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Women's Farming Union.

Mr. MacGregor: I met the chairman of the Women's Farming Union most recently at the annual general meeting of the Women's Farming Union on 23 November.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

67. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to publish a report on existing environmentally sensitive area arrangements and how they are working.

Mr. Ryder: Yes. I expect to publish a report on environmentally sensitive areas, as required by section 18(8) of the Agriculture Act 1986, early next year.

GATT

70. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the United States Secretary of State for Agriculture to discuss the general agreement on tariffs and trade mid-term review.

Mr. MacGregor: I last met Secretary Lyng in London on 17 November. We discussed a number of topics, including the GATT mid-term meeting.

71. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he proposes to attend the general agreement on tariffs and trade mid-term review in Montreal, in view of agriculture featuring in the negotiations.

Mr. MacGregor: Yes.

Food Surpluses

72. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the disposal of European Economic Community food surpluses.

Mr. Ryder: Economic Community stocks of most commodities have fallen significantly. Butter stocks are down 80 per cent. over last year and skimmed milk powder stocks virtually eliminated. Wheat stocks have fallen by two thirds since 1985 while beef stocks have fallen by 25 per cent. over the last year.

Land Development

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many consultations with local planning authorities for non-agricultural development on agricultural land not in accordance with the development plan were received in the first six months of 1988; what was the Ministry's response to these consultations and what area they covered for each grade and subgrade of land, as defined by the agricultural land classification.

Mr. Ryder: From our records it is not possible to identify solely those consultations for non-agricultural development which were not in accordance with the development plan.

Latest figures for the first six months of 1988 indicate that MAFF/WOAD responded to some 690 consultations from local planning authorities in England and Wales relating to individual planning applications for non-agricultural development. Those responses involved 17 objections, six conditional objections, 100 conditional acceptances, 284 appraisals, 231 no objections and 52 cases which were either withdrawn or the referral was inappropriate. The grades of agricultural land and areas involved were 232 hectares of grade 1, 999 hectares of grade 2, 1,514 hectares of grade 3 (not subdivided), 2,097 hectares of grade 3a, 2,423 hectares of grade 3b, 1,247 hectares of grade 3c, 779 hectares of grade 4 and 147 hectares of grade 5.

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries of Food what proportion of consultations with local planning authorities for non-agricultural development on agricultural land not in accordance with the development plan are *(a)* in respect of an area of agricultural land in excess of 20 hectares and *(b)* in respect of agricultural land of grades 1, 2 or 3a, as defined by the agricultural land classification.

Mr. Ryder: From our records it is not possible to identify solely those consultations for non-agricultural development which were not in accordance with the development plan.

In 1987 some 17 per cent. of the consultations by planning authorities in England and Wales related to areas of agricultural land in excess of 20 hectares and some 28 per cent. related to grades 1, 2 or 3a agricultural land.

North Sea (Fishing)

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure fishing is practicable in the North sea once gas and oil installations are abandoned.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Government have taken the necessary powers in the Petroleum Act 1987 to control the abandonment of oil and gas installations. The fishing industry is being consulted on the measures to be included in abandonment programmes; it will also be consulted by the operators in the compilation of abandonment programmes for individual installations, and by Government after such programmes have been submitted to them. I shall certainly ensure that the interests of fishermen are taken fully into account before final decisions on each programme are taken.

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the fishing industry over proposed air combat training ranges in the North sea; and when he expects to make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My Department has consulted the fishing industry over a proposal to construct an air combat training range in the North sea. The industry's views will be taken fully into account when the Government decide whether the construction of the range can be approved.

Radioactivity (Cumbria)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline his reasons for giving information to farmers about the aerial survey into post-Chernobyl radioactivity at a meeting of representatives of the National Farmers Union in Carlisle on 23 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: It is our policy to keep restricted area farmers and their representatives fully informed of our programme of monitoring and research. The 23 November meeting was arranged so that my officials could provide a further progress report on our 1988 activities, including the aerial survey.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the results of the aerial survey into post-Chernobyl radioactivity levels in Cumbria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member on 28 November, *Official Report*, col. *100*.

Hill and Upland Areas

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he and his right hon. Friends have completed their review of the economic conditions in the hill and upland areas; and if he will make a statement on the rates of hill livestock compensatory allowances and associated scheme conditions for 1989.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friends and I have now completed the annual review of the economic conditions in the hills and uplands.

The review has shown that the average net farm incomes of livestock producers in the United Kingdom's less favoured areas have improved over the last two years, in some cases considerably. This situation owes much to the Government's support measures, including hill livestock compensatory allowances which are likely to top £115 million this year. We recognise that the support provided through HLCAs is of fundamental importance in maintaining the hill and upland communities and in providing environmental benefits, and we shall continue to give particular assistance to farmers in the LFAs. However, against the generally improving economic background in the LFAs, my colleagues and I have decided that the rates of hill livestock compensatory allowance for 1989 should remain at the current levels and that there should be no change in the associated conditions.

My colleagues and I know that many LFA producers are concerned about the impact on them of the proposed changes in the EC sheepmeat and beef regimes. We understand these concerns and, while we cannot predict the outcome of the current EC negotiations, we shall certainly have the special interests of the LFA livestock sector very much in mind in these negotiations.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

British Council (Arts)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the annual expenditure on the arts by the British Council, showing the art form and regional distribution, for each year since 1978.

Mr. Waldegrave: Reliable figures are not available for the years before 1984-85 and are not broken down by geographical area. Recent figures showing British Council annual expenditure on the arts are as follows:

British Council annual expenditure on the Arts
Figures in £'000 at in-year cash prices

	1988-89	*1987-88*	*1986-87*	*1985-86*	*1984-85*
A. All Arts (global) (including relevant exchanges, libraries and information activity, arts events, staff and running costs)	17,751	19,491	16,902	15,651	15,687
B. Activities managed by Arts Division (excluding exchanges etc, but including C)	7,513	9,036	7,958	6,838	7,310
C. Operational funds (excluding staff and overheads etc)					
Drama and Dance	925	1,038	1,058	1,145	1,306
Films/TV/Video	873	850	848	704	673
Fine Arts	694	793	554	537	551
Music/Opera	917	751	783	799	763

Hong Kong (Vietnamese Refugees)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with the Hong Kong Government in an effort to help resettle the Vietnamese boat people now being cared for by the Hong Kong Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are in close and frequent contact with the Hong Kong Government on all aspects of the Vietnamese boat people problem, including resettlement.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Council of Ministers.

Mrs. Chalker: The usual forecast was deposited in the House earlier today. At present 14 meetings of the Council of Ministers are planned for December. There may also be a Telecomunications Council on 12 December, but this is yet to be confirmed by the Presidency.

The European Council, to be held on 2-3 December at Rhodes, will discuss the further development of the Community with particular reference to the Commission's report on progress towards completion of the single market, submitted under article 8b of the treaty of Rome as amended by the Single European Act. It will also discuss the Community's role in the world and the Environment. Political co-operation subjects will also be covered.

The Transport Council is to meet on 8-9 December. Subjects for discussion include transport infrastructure; vehicle weights and dimensions; access to the road haulage profession; international bus and coach transport; barge shipping on inland waterways; shipping; air congestion; aids for combined transport; road haulage cabotage; vehicle taxation; possibly inter-regional air services; and third country transit, where it is hoped agreement to the second stage negotiating mandate can be reached.

The Fisheries Council will meet on 9-11 December to discuss the 1989 total allowable catches and quotas; relations with third countries; and possibly fish guide prices.

The Economic and Finance Council will meet on 12 December to consider the draft directive on the own funds of credit institutions; the Commission's annual report on the economic situation in the Community: and the Commission proposal for a regulation implementing the decision of 24 June 1988 on the system of the Communities' own resources. It will also discuss a statement by Lord Cockfield on the Commission's tax approximation proposals; proposed new regulations on uniform arrangements for the collection of own resources; possible Danish derogation from article 4(i) of Council directive 69/169; and the directive on the prospectus on transferable securities.

The Agriculture Council meets on 12 December and following days to discuss the reform of the beef and sheepmeat regimes; access to the Community for New Zealand butter; milk quotas; labelling of spirit drinks; income aids; beef import quotas; trade in minced meat and meat products; and zootechnical breeding standards in pigs. It may also consider tariff concessions on horticultural produce from the Canary Islands.

The Industry Council meets on 13 December. Ministers will consider an Italian proposal to grant 7,670 billion lire of aid to the Italian public sector steel industry to finance its restructuring. Proposals are also likely to be discussed on the renewal of the ECSC steel state aid code and on the funding of social measures for the steel industry.

The Tourism Council, meeting on 14 December, is expected to discuss a proposal that 1990 should be designated European Year of Tourism; a Commission working paper on priorities for future action in the tourism field; the draft package travel directive and EC co-ordination on the chairmanship of the OECD Tourism Committee.

The Health Council is to meet on 15 December. It will consider a report on Europe against cancer; tobacco; AIDS; drugs; and health aspects up to 1992.

The Research Council will meet on 15 December. The agenda is likely to include discussion of two-research and development programme proposals: JOULE (non-nuclear energy and efficient use of energy) and BRITE/EURAM (research in manufacturing technologies and advanced materials). Aeronautical research and a Commission paper on the state of EC science will also be discussed.

The Social Affairs Council meets on 16 December to discuss the social dimension of the internal market. Other subjects for discussion will be for health and safety proposals (the framework directive on safety in the workplace and the worker protection directives on carcinogens, benzene and limits on exposure to hazards), a directive to change the burden of proof in equal treatment legislation, and a decision on a second COMETT programme for co-operation between universities and industry in new technology training. Other items on the agenda include resolutions on the integration of women, racism, xenophobia and decisions on social measures for Greece and for shipbuilding areas.

The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 19-20 December. Subjects for discussion will be: follow-up to the European Council; structural funds; the progress of EC/US discussions on hormones; and financial protocols with Cyprus and Malta. In the margins, there will be a conference of representatives of member states on the Rome convention on contractual obligations and signature of the trade agreement with Czechoslovakia. Ministers will possibly also convene a conference of member states, formally to appoint the new Commission and its vice presidents.

The Internal Market Council on 21 December will discuss a number of measures relevant to the completion of the single market.

Robert Heron Blaggogee

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Minister of State intends to reply to the letter of 13 October sent to her by Sir Trevor Jones of Liverpool concerning Mr. Robert Heron Blaggogee.

Mrs. Chalker: I replied on 24 November 1988.

Antarctica

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards *(a)* non-governmental visits to the Antarctic and *(b)* proposed tourist developments within the Antarctic by other nations.

Mr. Waldegrave: The preamble to the Antarctic treaty calls for Antarctica to be used "exclusively for peaceful purposes". In our view, non-governmental visits and tourist developments in Antarctica fall into this category. We therefore do not object to them, as long as they comply with the relevant provisions of the Antarctic treaty, and measures adopted under it.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed change from consensus decision to majority voting in 1991 on the future operation of the Antarctic treaty.

Mr. Waldegrave: Any proposed amendment to the Antarctic treaty approved by majority vote at a conference convened under article XII of the treaty would need to be ratified by all Antarctic treaty consultative parties in order for it to enter into force. We do not, therefore, believe that majority voting at such a conference is likely to have a crucial effect on the future of the treaty.

Guatemala (Gunboat Incident)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Guatemala, following an incident involving a Royal Navy ship and a Guatemalan gunboat in Guatemalan waters on 20 November 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: At the time of the incident the RN vessel HMS Fawn was carrying out peaceful and legitimate hydrographic survey work in the high seas in the Gulf of Honduras. A protest has accordingly been made to the Guatemalan Government. The Royal Navy's survey work in the area will continue.

Mrs. Doina Cornea

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any information about a former lecturer at Cluj university, Romania, Mrs. Doina Cornea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Mrs. Cornea was arrested, along with other Romanian dissidents, in a crackdown following a demonstration in the Romanian city of Brasov last December. Those arrests formed the subject of a demarche by the Twelve to the Romanian authorities, in January this year. Her Majesty's ambassador and his staff have since made further representations, most recently on 22 November. We shall continue to speak up on her behalf.

Mrs. Cornea apparently remains under some form of house arrest. Members of the House may have seen the courageous and moving letter that she recently published in the British press, calling on President Ceausescu to abandon his policy of forced urban and rural resettlement.

We deplore arbitrary arrests and confinement of people for expressing their opinions. Romania's record in this respect is among the worst of all the signatories of the Helsinki Final Act and Madrid concluding document. We look to the Romanian Government, as to all participants in the CSCE process, to observe in full their commitments under these documents.

SCOTLAND

Health Boards

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of management staff in each area health board in Scotland that have explicit terms in their contracts of employment which increase remunerations when budgetary savings are realised.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Departmental guidance on contracts for NHS general and senior managers does not refer to a condition of service such as described by the hon. Member. Terms of contract are a matter to be agreed between individual staff and their employing health board.

NHS (Competitive Tendering)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all contracts for domestic services let by competitive tendering to outside operators within each of the regional health authorities in Scotland, together with their costs, for the period 1 October 1985 to 30 September 1988, showing in each case the cost of provision of the same services in the last year before competitive tendering was introduced.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: During this period contracts producing annual savings of over £2 million were awarded by the following boards:

	Number
Fife	1
Grampian	2
Greater Glasgow	3
Lothian	2
Tayside	1

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what instructions he has given to health boards concerning putting out annually services as an all-in package to competitive tendering.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None. Health boards know they must explore the scope for achieving value for money and improved services through the further development of competitive tendering. This is what they are now doing.

EC Structural Funds

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the areas of Scotland which will satisfy the criteria laid down, by the comprehensive regulations in the reform of the Community's structural funds approved by the Council of Ministers on 24 June 1988, for each of the following objectives: *(a)* to improve investment and productivity in deprived regions, *(b)* to rejuvenate declining industrial regions including urban areas, *(c)* to combat long-term unemployment which is affecting all age groups of the community's working population, *(d)* to integrate young people into employment, and *(e)* to encourage rural development as part of the reform of the common agricultural policy by (i) speeding up the adjustment of agricultural structure and (ii) promoting the development of rural areas;

(2) if he will make a statement on the impact of the Council of Ministers adoption of the comprehensive regulation of the reform of the Community's structural funds agreed on 24 June 1988 (2052/88);

(3) if he will list the areas of Scotland which will be eligible to receive moneys from *(a)* the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund, *(b)* the European social fund and *(c)* the European regional development fund, after the adoption, by the Council of Ministers, of the comprehensive regulation of the reform of the Communities structural funds on 24 June 1988 (2052/88).

Mr. Lang: The full implications of Council regulation EEC 2052/88 for Scotland will not be clear until the implementing regulations are adopted and the European Commission has made its decisions under the regulations on the eligibility of industrial (objective 2) regions and rural (objective 5 (b)) regions and on financial support. No Scottish region is eligible under objective 1 of article 1 of the regulation, whereas objectives 3, 4 and 5(a) may be applied throughout the Community.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the agencies or organisations which have submitted representations about the reform of the Community's structural funds.

Mr. Lang: Representations have been received by various Ministers and their Departments with an interest in the structural funds reform. Several have come from local authorities concerned about their future eligibility for assistance. No central record of representations is kept.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to ensure that the Scottish dimension has been fully considered in discussions on the reform of the Community's structural funds.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Office plays a full part in determining United Kingdom policy on the reform of the structural funds.

Health Centres (VAT)

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps will be taken to reimburse general practitioners following the introduction of value added tax on new health centre buildings.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is proposed to amend the statement of fees and allowances payable to general medical practitioners to take account of the imposition of value added tax on new building work from 1 April 1989. Consultations are at present taking place with representatives of the medical profession.

EC (Regional Assistance)

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the geographical areas or functions in Scotland which are eligible for moneys from *(a)* the European regional development fund, *(b)* social fund, *(c)* agricultural guidance and guarantee funds and *(d)* the European Investment Bank.

Mr. Lang: The following areas are eligible:

(a) European regional development fund—
All of the Highlands and Islands Development Board area.
The travel-to-work areas of Dumbarton, Greenock, Irvine, Glasgow, Kilmarnock, Lanarkshire, Cumnock and Sanquhar, Ayr, Girvan, Stranraer, Newton Stewart, Stewartry, Dundee, Arbroath, Falkirk, Alloa, Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, Bathgate.

(b) European social fund—
Some operations apply to the whole of Scotland; others are currently limited to Central, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Highlands, Lothian, Strathclyde and Tayside.

(c) Agricultural guidance and guarantee funds—
All of Scotland.

(d) European Investment Bank—
All of Scotland.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the total amount of loans made to Scotland by the European Investment Bank in each of the years 1983 to 1987 inclusive.

Mr. Lang: Loans are negotiated directly between the EIB and prospective borrowers. The numbers and amounts of loans disbursed in the years in question are as follows:

	Number	Amount £
1983	3	415,000
1984	2	290,000
1985	8	4,425,000
1986	6	28,363,000
1987	Nil	Nil

EIB loan offers made in the same period are as follows:

	Number	Amount £
1983	9	14,645,000
1984	11	40,236,000
1985	2	23,282,000
1986	Nil	Nil
1987	Nil	Nil

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he wil give the total amount of agricultural guidance and guarantee fund moneys allocated to Scotland in each of the years 1983 to 1987, inclusive, and for each assisted area or function so designated to receive such funds.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A detailed breakdown of receipts from the European agricultural guarantee and guidance fund is not available in the form requested. The table shows EAGGF receipts for the financial years 1983-84 to 1987-88 inclusive in respect of expenditure under various schemes.

To these amounts should be added the Scottish share of market support expenditure incurred by the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce—in the current year estimated to be of the order of £920 million.

£ million

	1983-84	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
1. *Reimbursement schemes*					
Capital grants-farm structure	11·143	6·082	5·855	4·727	3·289
Hill livestock compensatory allowances	8·364	8·570	8·460	9·013	10·031
Integrated development programme for the Western Isles	0·055	0·857	1·891	0·981	0·631
Fish producers' organisations	0·013	0·020	0·022	—	0·028
Marketing and processing projects	1·251	0·942	1·736	1·588	2·262
Fishery projects	0·674	2·500	2·975	4·020	3·250
	21·500	18·971	20·939	20·329	19·491
2. *Pre-funded schemes*					
Annual ewe premium	15·226	19·113	38·342	13·203	16·223
Suckler cow premium	3·537	3·551	3·359	3·419	6·233
Non-marketing of milk	1·209	1·130	0·179	0·004	—
Milk outgoers	—	—	—	—	4·331
Small cereals producers	—	—	—	—	0·213
	19·972	23·794	41·880	16·626	27·000

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the total amount of European regional development fund moneys allocated to Scotland in each of the years 1983 to 1987, inclusive, and for each assisted area so designated to receive such funds.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not available by assisted area. The following table gives a breakdown by region.

£ million

Region	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Central	4·3	2·4	7·2	2·9	1·4
Dumfries & Galloway	0·9	2·3	Nil	Nil	0·3
Fife	7·9	4·9	5·5	6·0	2·7
Grampian	0·2	Nil	0·4	Nil	0·5
Highland	7·4	9·4	7·3	4·2	3·9
Lothian	2·1	7·3	6·5	7·6	12·0
Strathclyde	38·4	58·6	37·2	48·6	50·5
Tayside	9·5	6·1	1·3	14·4	7·8
Orkney Isles	0·8	0·5	Nil	Nil	0·9
Shetland Isles	7·5	3·2	1·9	0·1	2·1
Western Isles	4·0	7·5	1·8	Nil	10·7
Other	0·2	1·1	0·3	Nil	Nil
Total	83·2	103·3	69·4	84·0	92·8

Note: Due to rounding, Regions showing Nil expenditure may have received amounts of less than £50,000.

Roads (Central Barriers)

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many road traffic accidents in Scotland in each of the last three years were caused on motorways or dual carriageways as a result of an absence of central barriers.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The absence of central barriers is not itself a cause of road traffic accidents. The number of accidents involving vehicles crossing the central reservation of a motorway or dual carriageway in the last three years is as follows.

Year	*Motorway*	*Dual carriageway*	*Total*
1985	25	55	80
1986	22	46	68
1987	18	50	68

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many miles of *(a)* motorway and *(b)* dual carriageway in Scotland have no central barriers; and, of each of these, how many have barriers planned.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: 104 miles of motorway and 204 miles of dual carriageway do not have central barriers at present. As a matter of policy central barriers are installed automatically on all new sections of motorway and dual carriageway. So far as existing sections of road are concerned, motorways are receiving highest priority. On dual carriageways, barriers are installed as opportunity arises in connection with other works and provision will be extended in due course to locations where it can be justified, taking account of traffic volumes and the incidence of crossover accidents.

Rating Reform

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to lay before Parliament the regulations on the community charge relating to exemptions for students.

Mr. Lang: The Personal Community Charge (Students) (Scotland) Regulations 1988, which define those students who will pay only 20 per cent. of the personal community charge, were laid before Parliament on 30 March 1988. Consultations have recently been carried out on the draft of a replacement set of regulations, which will be made very shortly. The main change in the new regulations will be the introduction of prescribed requirements about the provision of certificates and information by educational establishments, in accordance with amendments made to the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987 by the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Further Education

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Government have any plans to change the method of funding for Scotland's colleges of further education.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend is preparing legislation providing for the delegation of greater financial and managerial responsibilities to further education college councils. Colleges will continue to be funded by the education authorities, but I hope this will be in ways which better reflect each college's achievements in meeting the education and training needs of its area. Colleges will have greater freedom to earn and retain income generated by selling services—such as consultancy, research, and company specific training—at commercial rates.

Nurses (Grading)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nursing and midwifery staff from each of the old grades have been assimilated to each of the new grades in the clinical grading structure in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Health boards' returns show that for qualified staff almost half of enrolled nurses have gone to the higher grades available with percentage pay increases ranging from 18·7 to 47·2 per cent.: for staff nurses the proportion going to the higher grades is 78 per cent. with increases from 23·8 to 51·0 per cent. and for hospital sisters almost 60 per cent. will receive pay rises of between 16 and 49·4 per cent. Even on the basic grade, nursing auxiliaries will receive at least 7·6 per cent. Comprehensive details of the numbers of staff assimilated to the new grades are given in the table:

Previous grade	*Staff in post (whole-time equivalents)*	*Percentages transferred to each new clinical grade*								
		A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*
Nursing Auxiliary	16,857·43	95·6	4·4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hospital Staff NNEB	319·71	0·8	93·0	6·2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Enrolled Nurse	9,370·62	—	0·1	50·4	48·8	0·7	—	—	—	—
Enrolled District Nurse	257·76	—	—	1·7	97·1	1·2	—	—	—	—
Senior Enrolled Nurse	432·30	—	—	2·4	66·9	30·5	0·2	—	—	—
Staff Nurse	11,683·94	—	—	—	22·2	74·1	3·6	0·1	—	—
Staff Midwife	1,626·88	—	—	—	0·2	69·6	30·1	0·1	—	—
Deputy Sister	426·29	—	—	—	—	78·0	21·6	0·4	—	—
Sister II	5,551·13	—	—	—	—	—	41·5	56·9	1·6	—
Sister II Midwife	925·20	—	—	—	—	—	26·8	71·7	1·5	—
District Nurse Sister II	1,560·60	—	—	—	—	—	5·1	94·4	0·5	—
Sister I	61·17	—	—	—	—	—	3·9	34·4	61·7	—
Sister I Midwife	54·40	—	—	—	—	—	—	77·5	22·5	—
Health Visitor	1,399·44	—	—	—	—	—	—	98·9	1·0	0·1
Senior Nurse 8	595·06	—	—	—	—	—	—	5·9	74·1	20·0
Senior Nurse 8 (Midwife)	113·50	—	—	—	—	—	—	20·3	65·6	14·1
Senior Nurse 7	336·00	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·3	33·2	66·3
Senior Nurse 7 (Midwife)	19·00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	31·6	68·4
Clinical Teacher	298·68	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·7	99·3	—
Fieldwork Teacher	194·28	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	100·0	—
Practical Work Teacher	208·57	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	100·0	—
Tutor	354·56	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·3	99·7
Tutor Midwife	52·00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	100·0
Post Basic Students										
Enrolled Nurse	698·00	—	—	98·4	1·4	0·2	—	—	—	—
Staff Nurse	1,192·70	—	—	—	92·8	6·4	0·8	—	—	—
Deputy Sister	12·80	—	—	—	15·6	29·7	31·3	23·4	—	—
Sister II	51·00	—	—	—	13·7	3·9	17·7	64·7	—	—
Others	46·60	—	—	—	14·0	11·6	7·0	11·0	3·0	—

Previous grade	*Staff in post (whole-time equivalents)*	*Percentages transferred to each new clinical grade*								
		A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*
TOTALS	54,699·62	29·4	1·9	10·0	16·2	19·0	6·7	12·6	2·8	1·4

Agricultural Colleges

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future of the Scottish agricultural colleges.

Mr. Rifkind: The Government's policy towards the funding of agricultural R and D and advisory services and changes affecting further and higher agricultural education will have important implications for the future of the Scottish agricultural colleges. It is against this background that the chairman of Scottish Agricultural Colleges Ltd. and I have decided to establish a committee of inquiry, under the chairmanship of Sir Alwyn Williams, with the following terms of reference:

> "To consider the present and future requirement in Scotland for an agricultural advisory service, both general and specialist, which is publicly funded; for agricultural education, particularly those levels currently provided by the Scottish Agricultural Colleges; and for research and development, particularly in respect of these two functions, within the United Kingdom research base.
>
> To make recommendations to the Secretary of State and the Chairman of Scottish Agricultural Colleges Ltd.: having regard in particular to the present functions, scope and facilities of Scottish Agricultural Colleges as they have been recently developed and are presently organised, and to whether any changes should be made to their present responsibilities and to the relationships with the associated universities, local authority agricultural colleges, agricultural and other research institutes and other public bodies; taking into account the relationships with Scottish Office Departments and the Government's developing policies on the relevant functions."

ENERGY

Coal Mining Subsidence

Mr. Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received in response to the Government's consultation paper on coal mining subsidence legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Government have received over 50 written responses to the consultation paper. These are receiving careful consideration.

Prepayment Meters

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what action is being taken to encourage the provision of prepayment meters relying upon the number of coins rather than tokens where desired.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a matter for the electricity supply industry. I have asked the chairman of the Electricity Council to write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Electricity Industry (Privatisation)

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what account he will take of the commitment of the electricity distribution boards to purchase electricity from the proposed power stations at Wlyfa B, Hinkley C, West Burton B and Hams Hall in determining whether to issue a licence.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The CEGB has applied to my right hon. Friend for consent to construct power stations at Hinkley Point C and West Burton B. No applications have been made for Wylfa B and Hams Hall.

In determining whether to grant consent for the construction of a power station my right hon. Friend would take into account all relevant factors.

It would be for the CEGB to decide whether or not to proceed with the construction of a station for which consent has been granted.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether electricity prices for *(a)* domestic and *(b)* industrial users will be higher as a result of his decision to create a ring fence for non-fossil fuel in a private electricity supply industry.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The benefit electricity users get from the diversity of fuel sources used to generate their electricity is reflected in present electricity prices. This will not change as a result of privatisation.

THE ARTS

Nottingham Arts and Leisure

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will meet representatives of the Nottingham city council to discuss additional support for the arts and leisure in the city.

Mr. Luce: Funding the arts in Nottingham is the responsibility of East Midlands Arts in partnership with the Arts Council and the local authorities. I have received no request for a meeting from representatives of Nottingham city council.

Libraries

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will list those organisations which have responded to the libraries Green Paper.

Mr. Luce: As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) on 7 November, at column *14*, I have received about 7,000 representations.

These include responses from English library authorities (103), national and local political organisations (18), professional library groups and associations (47), other professional bodies (22), local community groups (48), educational groups (47), businesses (30) and other organisations (63). The other responses have come from individuals, including 214 from hon. Members.

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 30 November 1988]:* No. The institutions which I sponsor will be responsible for meeting any new controls on emissions which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment may introduce.

PRIME MINISTER

Winterbourne Zelstone

Q31. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make an official visit to Winterbourne Zelstone.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Hexham

Q126. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit the Hexham constituency.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

European Commission (Vice-President)

Q149. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister why, and in what respect, experience of the Department of Trade and Industry was a factor in the nomination of the right hon. and learned Gentleman, the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Brittan), as a vice-president of the European Commission.

The Prime Minister: As I told the hon. Member on 20 July 1988, at column *607*, the same criteria were applied as have been applied in the past, namely, ability and experience.

Privatisation (Costs)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the publicity and associated costs for each privatisation since 1979.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my righ hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) on 3 March 1988, at column *629*. This lists the cost to the Government of corporate and flotation advertising and advertising agency fees, exclusive of VAT, for each privatisation and residual share sale since the British Telecom sale of December 1984. Comparable figures for previous sales are not readily available.

Engagements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 December.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be departing this afternoon to attend the European Council in Rhodes.

Public Appointments Unit

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister what qualifications are required by an individual in order to be offered a job by the Public Appointments Unit.

The Prime Minister: The range of appointments made by Ministers, with advice from the Public Appointments Unit, where appropriate, provide opportunities for people with widely different qualities and experience.

Russian Spies

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to investigate the number of Russian spies in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: It is not the practice to comment on security matters of this kind.

Advisers

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will give the names and salaries, date of employment and previous occupational position of each of her full and part-time advisers paid out of public funds.

The Prime Minister: The names, dates of employment, and previous occupational position of each of my full and part-time advisers paid out of public funds are as follows:

Name	*Year of appointment*	*Previous employment*
G. D. Bourne	1988	BP Petroleum Development Ltd.
Mrs. T. Gaisman	1987	Conservative Central Office
Professor B. Griffiths	1985	The City University Business School
G. R. J. Guise	1986	Consolidated Goldfields PLC
I. K. Whitehead	1988	Bank of Montreal Capital Markets Ltd.
A. Dunlop	1988	Conservative Research Department
Miss C. Sinclair	1988	Her Majesty's Treasury

The current salary bill for these advisers is £246,903.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister how much has been spent by her Office in each year since 1979 on *(a)* outside consultants and *(b)* special advisers attached to No. 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister: *(a)* There has been no expenditure by my Office on fees to outside consultants since 1979-80 and none is planned for the rest of this year.

(b) the figures required for 1979 to 1985 are not available and cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost. The amount spent on advisers in the last three financial years is as follows:

	£
1986-87	247,518
1987-88	192,532
[1]1988-89	246,903

[1] Estimate.

10 Downing Street

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will provide a detailed breakdown of the £975,000 due to be spent in 1988-89 on refurbishment, restorations, electrical and security improvements and general maintenance at No. 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave on 29 July 1988 at column *628*.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister why she will not provide an analysis of the £213,318 from public funds spent to date in 1988-89 on furnishings and decoration in No. 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister: This information is not readily available and a detailed analysis can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will provide details of the changes made in estimating entertainment and other costs associated with her office.

The Prime Minister: Like other Government Departments, my office has been improving and refining its management accounting system. The most recent change was the introduction, in 1987-88, of delegated budgeting which has enabled expenditure to be estimated, and costs allocated more precisely.

Media (Accounts)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister whether all media organisations sending representatives accompanying her on official transport on visits abroad have settled their accounts.

The Prime Minister: It is too soon to expect all these accounts to have been settled.

Policy Unit

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost to public funds of scrapping the Central Policy Review Staff; and what has been the cost of the Prime Minister's policy unit in each year since its inception.

The Prime Minister: In the last full year of its operation (1982-83) the estimated cost to public funds of the Central Policy Review Staff was £1,109,000[1]. Its abolition involved no costs to public funds; indeed, it represented a saving of this amount. The costs of the Prime Minister's policy unit, on a comparable basis, in each year since its inception is as follows:

	£
1979-80	37,669
1980-81	59,366
1981-82	63,846
1982-83	93,633
1983-84	154,923
1984-85	220,234
1985-86	270,610
1986-87	327,979
1987-88	311,110
1988-89[2]	349,527

[1] Based on number of staff in post.

[2] Estimate.

President Reagan (Official Gifts)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will give a description and the cost of each of the official gifts she has given to President Reagan since 1981.

The Prime Minister: No. The customary practice is to give official gifts to Heads of Government, Heads of State, and small numbers of officials on the occasion of each visit to a country, but it is not considered appropriate to give details of these.

Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister how many Labour hon. and right hon. Members have received hospitality at No. 10 Downing street in the past year.

The Prime Minister: Twenty right hon. and hon. Labour Members have received hospitality at 10 Downing street between 29 November 1987 to 29 November 1988.

President Waldheim

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Prime Minister if she has received any recent communications connecting President Waldheim of Austria with war crimes involving British citizens; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to the right hon. learned Member on 30 November 1988.

Trevor Clay

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Prime Minister whether she has requested the Public Appointments Unit to consider Trevor Clay for appointment.

The Prime Minister: The Public Appointments Unit maintains a list which currently contains over 5,000 names of people from all walks of life who might be considered for public appointments. It would be inappropriate to comment on individuals who have been nominated in confidence, but nominations submitted to my office from whatever source would be referred to the unit as a matter of course.

Foreign Travel

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what has been the cost to public funds in real terms in every year since 1979 of foreign travel undertaken by her and those accompanying her; and if she will give the amount spent in real terms in the same number of years prior to 1979.

The Prime Minister: The cost to public funds in real terms in every year[1] since 1979 of my foreign travel and of those accompanying me is as follows:

	Constant prices 1986-87
[2] 1979-80	253,894
1980-81	187,828
1981-82	713,388
1982-83	627,140
1983-84	247,269
1984-85	453,848
1985-86	472,953
1986-87	447,066
1987-88	404,414
[3] 1988-89	393,582

Information on expenditure in years prior to 1979 cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Notes:

[1] Billing delays prevent some costs from being shown in the financial year in which the services were provided. The figures, therefore, do not necessarily reflect when the expenditure was actually incurred.

[2] From May 1979.

[3] Estimate.

WALES

Nurses

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has been allocated by his Department to each Welsh county area health authority for payments to nurses as a result of their regrading.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is as follows:

District Health Authority	*£m*[1]
Clwyd	6·7
East Dyfed	3·5
Pembrokeshire	1·2
Gwent	8·0
Gwynedd	3·6
Mid Glamorgan	9·6
Powys	1·8
South Glamorgan	7·7
West Glamorgan	6·4

Note: [1] The figures quoted differ in the case of some authorities from those provided in the reply to the hon Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 4 November, as at columns *781-82*, as they include the distribution of the £500,000 which was provided to meet the cost of other consequential changes arising from the review body award.

Sir Raymond Gower: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of clinical nursing and midwifery staff have been assimilated to each of the new clinical grades by each district.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information requested is given in the following table:

Nurses Clinical Grading Review—Wales
Percentage of all clinical staff assimilated to each of the new clinical grades

District Health authority	*Total WTE*	*A per cent*	*B per cent.*	*C per cent.*	*D per cent.*	*E per cent.*	*F per cent.*	*G per cent.*	*H per cent.*	*I per cent.*
Gwent	4,133·22	28	2	4	20	19	7	15	2	3
Mid Glamorgan	4,715·16	21	7	5	22	17	7	15	3	2
West Glamorgan	2,996·54	17	3	8	17	26	9	17	2	2
South Glamorgan	4,237·68	26	6	4	20	19	8	14	2	3
Clwyd	3,162·18	24	3	6	19	18	10	15	3	3
Pembrokeshire	660·99	23	2	11	17	20	10	14	3	0
East Dyfed	1,951·18	28	2	11	14	18	7	15	2	3
Gwynedd	1,878·24	24	3	9	12	25	5	17	2	3
Powys	1.052·42	29	10	18	6	9	13	12	2	0
Totals	24,787	24	4	7	18	19	8	15	2	3

Note: Due to rounding totals may not balance exactly.

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total cost of the Pembrokeshire coast national park in each year since 1984; what was the annual supplementary grant provided by his Department to Dyfed county council in each of these years for the park; and what was the percentage by which the supplementary grant was increased in each of these years.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested in respect of the Pembrokeshire coast national park is as follows:

Financial year	*Total net expenditure by park (£'s)*	*National Parks Supplementary Grant paid by Welsh Office for park (£'s)*	*Percentage increase of National Park Supplementary Grant on previous year (per cent.)*
1984-85	888,675	622,500	6·22
1985-86	927,025	663,000	6·51
1986-87	1,033,057	715,955	7·99
1987-88	1,289,664	807,075	12·73
1988-89	[1] 1,460,420	888,300	10·06

[1] Estimated expenditure.

Housing

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from Preseli-Pembrokeshire district council in 1988 concerning the housing stock in its district; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: In common with all Welsh local authorities Preseli-Pembrokeshire district council submits to the Department annually its housing services investment programme for the forthcoming financial year. The authority reacted quickly and positively following the publication of the Welsh house condition survey earlier this year and is liaising with the Department on a strategic approach which will help address the outstanding housing issues in the area.

DEFENCE

Property and Land

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the property and land his Department holds in the Nottingham, North constituency.

Mr. Freeman: The Ministry of Defence has no land holdings in the Nottingham, North constituency.

Bullying

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the allegations of bullying at Bassingbourn barracks, Hertfordshire, in respect of Wayne Beal and other recruits.

Mr. Freeman: The special investigation branch of the Royal Military Police are investigating the allegation of bullying at the Queen's Division depot at Bassingbourn that involve Private Wayne Beal and three other recruits. Once these are completed, I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how he will ensure that members of the armed services who are bullied by non-commissioned officers can complain to senior officers without subsequent victimisation.

Mr. Freeman: I can assure my hon. Friend that there will be no victimisation of any soldiers, especially young recruits, who speak out about bullying or mistreatment. All officers are well aware of their fundamental responsibility for the well-being of their soldiers and of the serious nature of these matters and are alert for such offences occurring. They will undoubtedly assist with passing complaints forward to commanding officers whose duty it is to investigate all such complaints.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the financial savings to his Department since the introduction of competitive tendering.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Department's commercial approach to defence procurement, including the greater emphasis on competition, has achieved substantial cost savings. Eleven examples were included in the 1988 statement on the Defence Estimates where savings of some £105 million had resulted. It is however, difficult to estimate the savings resulting from competitive tendering in the absence, in some instances, of information as to the price that would have been achieved without competition. In addition, the wide range of circumstances where competition can be used to make it impossible to calculate the cumulative savings made since the adoption of this commercial approach in the early 1980s. Competition has also promoted the more efficient use of industrial resources which has contributed to the recent considerable export successes of British industry.

Career Opportunities (Army)

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement of additional measures to increase public awareness of the career opportunities which the Army has to offer.

Mr. Freeman: At present, I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) on 9 November at column 184.

Woolwich Arsenal

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further consideration he has given to the possible release of surplus land at Woolwich Arsenal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I shall be writing to the hon. Gentleman in the next few days with a map of the area to be released, as promised in my answer on 31 October 1988 at column *531*.

Directorate-General of Quality Assurance

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects to be able to announce a decision on the future location of the headquarters of the directorate-general of quality assurance.

Mr. Sainsbury: Ministers are currently considering the results of an investment appraisal concerning the future location of the directorate-general of defence quality assurance.

Guatemala (Incident)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy ship was involved in an incident involving a Guatemalan gunboat in Guatemalan waters on 20 November; whether shots were fired; what action he has taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The RN ship involved was the hydrographic vessel HMS Fawn. The incident took place not in Guatemalan territorial waters but while Fawn was conducting a hydrographic survey in international waters to the north of a median line between Belize and Guatemala. Shots were fired in the vicinity of HMS Fawn: it is not known whether these were aimed at her or were intended simply as a warning. A diplomatic protest has been made to the Guatemalan Government. The survey will, of course, continue.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Community Policing

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the present level of community policing in the Braniel and Belvoir estates in the Strangford constituency; and if he will make a statement on the future of policing in these two estates.

Mr. Ian Stewart: In each of the Braniel and Belvoir estates, daily attention is given by a local neighbourhood constable. Passing attention is given by divisional mobile patrol vehicles. Deployment of the RUC is a matter for the Chief Constable but I understand that there is no intention at present to alter the level of police cover in these estates.

Maintained Schools

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will introduce the legislation relating to the establishment of the new Council for Catholic Maintained Schools separately from the overall Order in Council for changes in the education system in Northern Ireland;

(2) whether the forthcoming legislation relating to the establishment of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools will restrict itself to *(a)* procedures for the appointment, promotion, dismissal and disciplining of teachers, *(b)* procedures to centrally appoint and employ all teachers in Roman catholic maintained schools and be responsible for their deployment and *(c)* the oversight of schools management and co-ordinate planning and rationalisation within the maintained schools sector, as outlined in the document issued on 30 July 1987 by the Northern Ireland information service;

(3) whether the functions proposed for the education and library boards in relation to maintained schools, as outlined in the document "Education in Northern Ireland —Proposals for Reform," remain unaffected by the establishment of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; and whether he will make it his policy in any future legislation that this body will have advisory functions only.

Dr. Mawhinney: It remains the Government's intention that the legislation to establish the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools will be included in the proposal for a draft Order in Council which will give effect to the education reforms for Northern Ireland.

The draft order will describe the proposed functions of the council and its publication next year will provide an opportunity for further consultation.

Students

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many EEC students are now receiving grants to attend universities and centres of higher education in Northern Ireland; what is the total estimated cost of these grants; how many of these EEC students come from the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Exact figures are not yet available. However, approximately 90 EEC students (of whom 88 come from the Republic of Ireland) are currently receiving discretionary grants, consisting of fees only, to attend universities and centres of higher education in Northern Ireland. In addition to these, some 1,030 EEC students in these institutions are not charged fees, in accordance with the arrangements announced in this House on 1 July 1986 by the then Secretary of State for Education and Science. It is not possible to say precisely how many of the latter came from the Republic of Ireland, but it is known that the overwhelming majority are from that country. The total estimated costs of these grants and forgone fee income is around £655,000.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many undergraduates are at *(a)* University of Ulster and *(b)* Queen's university, Belfast; how many students from other EEC countries attend each of these universities; and, of these, how many from the Republic of Ireland attend each of the universities.

Dr. Mawhinney: Provisional information for the 1988-89 academic year is as follows:

	Total *(a)*	*Other EC*[1] *(b)*	*Republic of Ireland* *(c)*
University of Ulster			
Full-time	7,781	59	828
Part-time	2,017	—	51
Queen's University			
Full-time	6,699	4	191
Part-time	773	4	6

[1] Excluding United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland.

Note: Figures in columns *(b)* and *(c)* are included in column *(a)*.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Graduates

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the numbers of young people leaving universities and polytechnics and being available for work in each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Future recruitment and, certainly, students' intentions after qualifying, are obviously difficult to predict. A key factor over the next five years is the continuing fall in the traditional student entry age group. However, due to increasing participation rates and greater recruitment of part-time and mature students, numbers generally are projected to hold up against that trend. Indeed, the number of home students at higher education institutions in Great Britain who were under 21 on entry and, on qualifying, would enter the labour market is estimated to grow from nearly 100,000 in 1987 to about 150,000 in 1992.

Special Schools, Bromley

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the London borough of Bromley about the transfer of Inner London education authority schools for children with special educational needs which are situated in Bromley to that borough; and whether he has been offered any undertaking by that borough to maintain such schools as special schools if transferred.

Mr. Butcher: The London borough of Bromley has indicated an interest in taking over responsibility for the two residential special schools maintained by ILEA which are located in Bromley. My right hon. Friend will take decisions about the allocation of ILEA's residential special schools in the light of discussions currently taking place with all the councils concerned. Any proposal for the discontinuance of one of these schools would require statutory proposals in accordance with the Education Act 1981.

Students (Financial Support)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his Department's latest estimate of implementing the proposals in the White Paper "Top-Up Loans for Students," Cm. 520; and what is the cost of the present system.

Mr. Jackson: The additional costs of top-up loans, net of savings in social security benefit and grant, calculated on the assumption of a constant 3 per cent. rate of inflation, are set out in annex E of the White Paper. When the cost of the proposed access funds is also taken into account, the Government's proposals imply a cumulative additional expenditure of about £850 million at 1990-91 prices by the year 2003, when net savings begin to accrue. Net expenditure on mandatory grants to students in England and Wales in academic year 1988-89, exclusive of fees, is estimated at £523 million in current prices.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's full review on student financial support; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Government's conclusions in the light of its review of student support were published in the White Paper "Top-up Loans for Students" (Cm. 520).

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those organisations which submitted *(a)* oral evidence and *(b)* written evidence to his Department's review on student financial support.

Mr. Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 28 July 1988 (cols. *403-4*). The British Medical Association was mistakenly omitted from the list of organisations provided.

Student Unions

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* the terms of reference of his Department's review of student unions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) on 18 April, at column *292*. There are no other terms of reference for the review.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list by grade the personnel currently employed on his Department's review of student unions.

Mr. Jackson: The Department's current work on student unions is being undertaken by a team of officials which includes student affairs among its normal responsibilities. The team comprises the following officers:

	Number
Grade 5	1
Grade 7	1
Higher Executive Officer	1
Executive Officer	1
Administrative Officer	1

City Technology College (Bradford)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the feasibility study being conducted into the Bradford city technology college is to be completed; who was commissioned to conduct the study and at what fee; what were the terms of reference for the study; and if, when complete, he will place a copy of the study in the Library.

Mrs. Rumbold: The study is being carried out by the architects and building branch of the DES. Its purpose is to examine the costs of various options as to size and make-up and to study more generally the feasibility and costs of systems building for new CTC developments. The study is expected to be completed in January. Such studies are confidential to the Department and the sponsor.

TRANSPORT

British Rail

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will revise his quality of service objectives for British Rail to prevent overcrowding on trains between Halifax and Leeds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Quality standards on PTE-supported services are entirely a matter for the PTE.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, when he next meets the chairman of British Rail, he will discuss updating the railway station at Sowerby Bridge.

Mr. Portillo: That is a management matter for BR and the West Yorkshire PTE.

Accident Statistics

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many deaths on Britain's roads are associated with the taking of alcohol.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Too many, even though the numbers are falling.

In 1986, the latest year for which full figures are available, there were about 950 deaths in crashes where at least one of the drivers or riders had a blood/breath alcohol level above the legal limit. In addition, 30 per cent. (approximately 400 people) of the adult pedestrians killed in road accidents had a blood alcohol level above the legal limit for driving.

It cannot be assumed that alcohol consumption caused every death as we do not collect information on the cause of accidents.

M66 (Portwood-Denton)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects the M66 from Portwood to Denton to be opened; and what are the reasons for the delay.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: By mid-1989. A few weeks delay has been caused by unforeseen difficulties during earthmoving operations and by additional work on the motorway communications.

Dr. Tony Ridley and Sir Keith Bright

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if negotiations on severance terms with Dr. Ridley and Sir Keith Bright have been concluded.

Mr. Portillo: No.

Road Traffic Offences

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to bring forward legislation on the recommendations of the North committee on road traffic offences.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We aim to announce our conclusions on the North report early in the new year. Legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time can be found for it.

Merchant Navy

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for changes to the certification requirements for officers serving on United Kingdom registered merchant ships.

Mr. Portillo: I am today placing in the Library of the House a copy of a consultation paper issued by the Department which invites comments on proposals for changes to the certification requirements for officers serving on United Kingdom registered merchant vessels.

The changes would allow holders of certificates of competency issued by any member state of the European Community to serve as junior officers on board United Kingdom vessels. Such changes would be compatible with our obligations under Community law and would provide shipping companies operating on the United Kingdom register with greater flexibility in manning their vessels. If adopted, the changes would come into effect early next year.

The paper considers the implications of the changes for the safety of United Kingdom ships, the employment prospects for British seafarers, and United Kingdom's defence requirements. It also considers the case for extending recognition beyond the European Community. Comments are invited by 20 January 1989.

Drink-Driving

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will take further measures to tackle the problem of drinking and driving by people who may have a medical alcohol problem.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In 1983 we introduced a scheme covering the high-risk offenders—those disqualified from driving twice within 10 years because the level of alcohol in their bodies was on each occasion 2½ times or more above the legal limit, or for twice refusing to supply a specimen for analysis, or for separate disqualifications for each offence. They are required to satisfy the medical branch of the driver and vehicle licensing centre that they do not have a drink problem and are otherwise fit to drive before their licence is returned after their statutory three-year period of disqualification. In the light of experience, we now propose moving the threshold for that scheme to the level recommended by the Blennerhassett committee, so that it will include all those who are convicted of driving while 2½ times or more over the limit, as well as on the other categories. We propose that offenders should pay all the administrative charges needed to cover the costs of the new scheme.

Our intention is to include these proposals with others which arise from consideration of the North committee's review of road traffic law. We expect to announce the Government's conclusions on North early next year, so that the House will have the opportunity to consider the package as a whole before any legislation is introduced.

Vehicle Number Plates

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when details of the proposed new British standard for vehicle number plates will be made available.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The British Standards Institution has now issued for public comment a draft revision of BS AU 145a governing the manufacture of number plates. I have placed a copy in the Library.

We welcome these proposals. The quality and durability of plates would be improved and the proposed unique standard character font would be much easier to read than many of the styles currently available.

The revised standard is an integral part of a package of measures which, if approved by the House, would make it much harder for criminals to obtain number plates for illegal purposes. The package has been extensively discussed with number plate producers, and has been tailored to keep additional costs to the trade and the motorist to a minimum.

Depending on the outcome of BSI's consultation exercise we would hope to present the necessary regulations next spring so that the scheme could be mandatory from 1 August 1990.

South Circular Assessment Study

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which of the options listed in the south circular assessment study 2A report he has instructed Travers Morgan to develop during the south circular assessment study stage 2B.

Mr. Peter Bottomley We have not yet taken any view on the preliminary options produced by the study consultants. This must await the submission of the consultants' report in the summer of 1989.

NATIONAL FINANCE

EC (Contributions)

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what refunds the United Kingdom has received as a result of the Fontainebleau agreement, from the net European Community contributions paid since 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Abatements made by the United Kingdom in respect of our VAT contributions since 1985 are set out in the table below:

Year abatement made	*Amount of abatement*	
	(million ecu)	*(£ million)*
1985	1,000	[1]605
1986	1,900	1,262
1987	1,633	1,153
1988	2,397	[2]1,598

[1] United Kingdom actually received £439 million of this in the first few days of January 1986.

[2] Estimate based on annual exchange rate to October 1988 of £1 = 1·5 ecu.

In addition, the 1989 revised draft budget includes an abatement of 1,780 mecu (£1,187 million).

Trade Balance

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he estimates that the annual balance of trade will next be in surplus.

Mr. Major: The Chancellor's Autumn Statement, which is available in the House of Commons Library, provided forecasts of visible trade for 1988 and 1989. Forecasts for later years are not published.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the current level of interest rates on the prospects for Britain's balance of trade in manufactured goods.

Mr. Major: The rise in interest rates since the summer will act to slow the growth of domestic demand. This will, in time, reduce the growth of manufactured imports and thereby help to improve the balance of trade in manufactured goods.

Trade Deficit

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the trade deficit was financed in 1987 and in the current year to date; and if he will publish in the *Official Report*, a table showing the changes in the capital account which have occurred as a result of the deficit in the current account.

Mr. Major: Figures for the current account, capital account transactions and the balancing item up to the second quarter of 1988 are available in the September edition of *Economic Trends*, published by the CSO.

Government Debt

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for the last available date how much of the indebtedness of central Government, including deposits with savings banks and all short-term debt instruments, are held by the public sector and private sectors, respectively; if he will provide a breakdown showing how much is held by, in particular, the national insurance fund, the Bank of England and the exchange equalisation account, as well as banks, pension funds, building societies and overseas residents; and if he will provide comparable figures for 1958, 1968 and 1978.

Mr. Lilley: I refer the hon. Member to the article on the net debt of the public sector in the November 1988 Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin for the latest figures on central Government debt and a breakdown of market holders. Comparable figures for 1968 and 1978 can be found in the 1968 and 1978 December editions of the Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin respectively. Comparable figures for 1958 are published in the January-March 1962 Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin. A complete breakdown of official holders is not published. However, debt held by the National Insurance Fund (NIF) is published annually in the NIF accounts.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing how much debt has been unfunded in each of the past two financial years and in the current year to date; what is his forecast for the whole of the current financial year and his estimate for 1989-90; and whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the public debt which has been retired as a result of unfunding and the saving in interest which has resulted therefrom.

Mr. Lilley: The Government's policy is to fund the net total of maturing debt, the PSBR and any underlying change in foreign exchange reserves by sales of debt outside the banking and building society sectors. If that total is negative, unfunding is required. The relationship between funding and the stock of public debt is not straightforward. An article in the November 1988 Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin, "The Net Debt of the Public Sector: End March 1988" discusses the matter further.

The Government's estimate of funding or unfunding required in the current financial year is itself, and is based upon, market sensitive information. It is not the Government's policy to publish such information.

Schools (Charitable Status)

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost to the Exchequer of charitable status of non-state schools in the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret that this information is not available.

Emission Controls (Crown Immunity)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will be seeking Crown immunity from prosecution for the institutions which are the responsibility of his Department when the anticipated new controls on emissions come into operation.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 30 November 1988]:* I refer to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply on 29 November. My Department has no plans to seek removal of Crown immunity in relation to the proposed air pollution regulations.

Inflation

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the rate of inflation *(a)* in June 1979, *(b)* in June 1988 and *(c)* now.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 29 November 1988]:* The RPI increased by 11·4 per cent. in the 12 months to June 1979, 4·6 per cent. to June 1988, and 6·4 per cent. to October 1988.

Incomes

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures for 1979-80 and 1988-89 showing net incomes, after income tax, national insurance contribution and child benefit, at *(a)* two-thirds average earnings, *(b)* average earnings, *(c)* twice average earnings and *(d)* three times average earnings, of single-wage married couples with two children as percentages of the net incomes at the same earnings levels of (i) single people and (ii) two-wage married couples, where the combined wage comes to the specified total and the husband earns two thirds and the wife one third.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* The information is in the table:

Net income of one earner married couple with 2 children as a percentage of net income of (a) single person and (b) 2 earner married couple with no children on same level of earnings

Multiples of average earnings[1]	*⅔*	*1*	*2*	*3*
(a) As percentage of net income of single person				
1979-80	121·9	115·3	108·0	106·7
[2]1988-89	117·4	112·0	107·4	105·4
(b) As percentage of net income of married couple with two earners and no children				
1979-80	101·9	100·7	103·4	106·7
[2]1988-89	99·8	100·1	102·6	105·1

The amounts of income (£ per week) are as follows:

Net income after income tax, national insurance contributions and child benefit (£ per week)

Multiples of average earnings[1]	*⅔*	*1*	*2*	*3*
Married couple with one earner and two children				
1979-80	65·46	88·60	163·44	226·55
[2]1988-89	145·99	201·89	379·14	531·60
Single				
1979-80	53·71	76·85	151·30	212·29
[2]1988-89	124·33	180·23	353·18	505·64
Married couple with two earners and no children				
1979-80	64·24	88·02	158·14	288·15
[2]1988-89	146·27	201·62	369·43	533·41

[1] Average earnings are those for full time males working a full week at adult rates in all occupations. They are £109·30 per week in 1979-80 and assumed to be £254·10 in 1988-89, an increase of 8½ per cent. on average earnings in 1987-88 (the increase used by the Government Actuary in assessing the level of the National Insurance Fund as described in paragraph 3.02 of the Autumn Statement 1988).

[2] Provisional.

VAT

Mr. Warren: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why he introduced value added tax on components supplied for multinational defence programmes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* There has been no change in the VAT treatment of such programmes. Although there is no general relief for defence projects, components for international defence projects may be relieved of tax if they are exported or, in broad terms, if they are supplied by or to overseas bodies under arrangements that incorporate formal inter-governmental agreement to waive tax. If my hon. Friend has a particular point in mind, he is of course welcome to write me.

ENVIRONMENT

National Tree Week

73. **Mr. Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what initiatives his Department has been taking to encourage and publicise National Tree Week.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department continues to grant-aid the Tree Council, which is responsible for organising National Tree Week. On Monday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister marked National Tree Week by planting a tree at the Chelsea physic garden and announcing that the Government will provide substantial additional funds to carry forward restoration of the treescape following last year's storm.

Some £7 million has already been allocated for planting of amenity trees, including £2·8 million for the coming financial year. In each of the following two years, 1990-91 and 1991-92, £3 million will now be made available, bringing to some £13 million the total provision for this programme. Most of this is being distributed through task force trees, a special unit of the Countryside Commission and the remainder through English Heritage and its scheme for the clearance and replanting of parks and gardens of outstanding architectural or historic interest.

Lighting (House of Commons)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the lighting in the Chamber of the House conforms to the Health and Safety Executive standards for workplaces.

Mr. Chope: There is no Health and Safety Executive standard which is readily applicable to the Chamber of the House. The HSE Guidance Booklet "Lighting at Work" (HS/G38) suggests a number of levels of average illuminance ranging from 20 lux for corridors and circulation routes to 500 lux for locations such as drawing offices and factories assembling electronic components.

The actual measured illuminance on the Floor of the Chamber varies from over 200 lux at the table to about 60 lux on the Back Benches.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to change the law on waste disposal; and if he is now able to give an estimate of when such legislation is likely to be introduced.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Legislation on waste disposal will be introduced as soon as possible during this Parliament. The main measures to be included were announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 29 June 1988 at column 4 and further proposals were put forward in a consultation paper issued on 23 November 1988.

Bed and Breakfast

Mr. James Lamond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the latest figures for households in bed and breakfast accommodation *(a)* in Greater Manchester, *(b)* in the Oldham metropolitan borough council and *(c)* in England and Wales as a whole.

Mr. Trippier: Latest national estimates of households temporarily placed in bed and breakfast accommodation by English local authorities appear in table 4(a) and numbers reported by individual authorities in table 7 of "Local authorities' action under the homelessness provisions of the 1988 Housing Act: England. Results for the second quarter 1988. Supplementary Tables", which is available in the Library.

For Welsh figures I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Rent Arrears

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out figures showing the increase in rent arrears in each local authority in England and Wales since April.

Mr. Trippier: The information is not available centrally for English authorities. For information about Wales I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what legal provisions he intends to make to increase the safety of people living in houses in multi-occupation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: We have received so far over 200 responses to our consultation paper on houses in multiple occupation issued on 18 July, copies of which are in the Library. We are currently considering possible legislative changes in the light of those responses.

Mobility

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage the independent rented sector to make adequate provision for a continuation of the principles of mobility as embraced in the national mobility scheme.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend fully recognises the importance of tenant mobility. With his approval, the Housing Corporation will shortly be issuing guidance to registered housing associations on the management of their housing accommodation. Amongst other things, this will make it clear that associations are expected to respond to the mobility needs of their tenants and to participate actively in national and local mobility and exchange schemes.

Pipeline Schemes (Chelmsford)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to reach a decision on Chelmsford borough council's submission on pipeline schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Of the eight applications submitted by the council, those in respect of the White Hart lane local park and the Airey houses project, Roxwell have already been approved. The applications in respect of the Kings Head meadow and Wharf road development and of the Victoria road livestock market redevelopment will be further considered when decisions on the related compulsory purchase orders have been reached; a decision on the latter is expected shortly. The application in respect of Hylands house will similarly be considered following determination of a planning application now before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. No information on expenditure or receipts has yet been provided in respect of the Airey house project, Galleywood, the highways land exchanges, or the civic centre site development; without these the applications cannot be taken further.

Elderly Persons (Sheltered Housing)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, for each local authority, how many units of sheltered housing for the elderly they provide.

Mr. Trippier: The number of sheltered dwellings for the elderly owned by local authorities is reported in the annual housing investment programme returns. The information for each local authority appears in columns A2A1 (stock inside authority's own area) and A2A6 (stock outside authority's area) of the "HIP1 (1988) All items print" which is in the Library.

European Community Regulations (Infraction)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cases of infraction in the United Kingdom have been brought to his Department's attention following enforcement of article 6 of the European Economic Community regulation 3626/82; and what were the results of investigations in these cases.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not readily available. The Department does not hold a comprehensive record of infractions.

Stray Dogs

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with local authority organisations on that part of the Local Government Act 1988 referring to stray dogs; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The powers enabling local authorities to exercise the same powers as the police in relation to stray dogs were included in the Local Government Act 1988 after consultation with the local authority associations.

Dog Registration

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is considering allowing local authorities to introduce local dog registration schemes in accordance with the Local Government Act 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no plans to introduce local dog registration schemes.

Water Authorities (Land Holdings)

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what area of land owned by water authorities is currently registered under the provisions of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1981 as being unused or underused.

Mr. Moynihan: The figure for the nine water authorities in England at 29 November 1988, is 2,200 acres.

Nature Conservancy Council (Budget)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the consequences *(a)* in financial terms and *(b)* on work undertaken of the 5 per cent. reduction in real terms in the budget of the Nature Conservancy Council for 1989-90 in the areas of (i) sites of special scientific interest notification/renotification, (ii) land purchase, (iii) marine conservation, (iv) urban conservation, and (v) grants to voluntary organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave him yesterday at column *284* concerning the basis of the Nature Conservancy Council's allocation for 1989-90. The Council is responsible for the detailed planning and distribution of its budget and its estimates and corporate plan for 1989-90 will make appropriate provision for the areas listed.

White Paper on the Environment

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department will be issuing a White Paper on the environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ridley: It is not customary to issue White Papers unless they contain detailed proposals for legislation. Our programmes for conserving the environment go far wider than what can be achieved through further legislation.

Rating Reform

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the Government have now decided on the boundary for rating purposes between domestic and non-domestic property.

Mr. Gummer: My Department and the Welsh Office are today issuing a consultation paper on the boundary for rating purposes after 1 April 1990 between domestic and non-domestic property, prior to making the necessary regulations. The paper makes proposals in several areas where it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between domestic and non-domestic use. The main proposal is that individual short-let accommodation, such as holdiay cottages, should be treated as domestic and subject to the standard community charge. We have concluded that this is the most practical course, given the difficulties involved in identification, valuation and monitoring of use that would arise if they were to be liable to non-domestic rates. Holiday complexes, for instance blocks of holiday flats or chalets, will however be subject to rating.

I am placing copies of the consultation paper in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what would have been the average community charge for the whole of Great Britain in 1988-89 based on local authority expenditure returns.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 25 November 1988]:* The types of service provided by local authorities are not the same in each country and hence an average figure would not be meaningful.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of negotiations regarding the arrangements for foreign Governments and diplomats to continue paying broadly the same contributions towards the cost of local services under the poll tax system as under the present rating system.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* Good progress is being made towards establishing the arrangements for contributions in lieu of the community charge under the new system of local government finance. These will be broadly the same as the contributions made under the present rating system.

Sewage Works (Discharge Consents)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many water authority sewage treatment works failed to meet their discharge consents in 1987; and if he will list them, by water authority, in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 28 November 1988]:* Almost 900 water authority sewage treatment works failed to comply with their discharge consent conditions during 1987. Copies of the water authority returns detailing the works concerned are now available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Lead Pipework

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average level of plumbosolvency of the water *(a)* in Nottingham and *(b)* nationwide; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: As there is no standard measure of plumbosolvency it is not possible to give a numerical answer. However, the water supply to the city of Nottingham is not considered to be aggressive to lead pipework.

Lead monitoring surveys by water undertakers between 1980 and 1985 identified 130 water supply zones serving some 5 million people where lead levels were of concern. Water treatment schemes have been completed in 66 zones. Schemes should be completed in the remaining zones by the end of 1989.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

General Medical Council

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Lord President of the Council what representations he has received from the General Medical Council concerning an increase in its membership; and if he will take steps to consult interested bodies prior to making any response.

Mr. Wakeham: The Privy Council has recently received an application from the General Medical Council proposing the addition of four elected members (one for Scotland, and three for England) and of a fifth to be appointed by the faculty of occupational health. Following the addition last year of two extra appointed lay members, these proposals would restore the size of the majority of elected members, which is required by the Medical Act, approximately to that which existed before. The GMC has consulted a wide range of bodies representing the profession on these proposals, and the

Privy Council will consider what further consultations, outside the profession, are desirable before a decision is reached.

Lobbies of Parliament

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the limit on the number of individuals allowed to enter the Palace of Westminster during a lobby of Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: Although there is no firm limit, experience has shown that, during the course of a mass lobby, approximately 1,000 lobbyists can be admitted to Central Lobby. A maximum of 100 people in total, which includes lobbyists and others, are allowed to be in the Central Lobby at any one time. A further 1,000 may be addressed by or meet Members in the Grand Committee Room and in the Interview Rooms off Westminster Hall. Details of these arrangements are contained in the leaflet "Notes for Members of Parliament on arrangements for Mass Lobbies" issued by the Serjeant at Arms.

Lighting (Chamber)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council, what representations he has received concerning lighting in the Chamber.

Mr. Wakeham: The only representations that I have received have been in connection with the work of the Committee on Televising of Proceedings of the House, which I chair. Those received from right hon. and hon. Members have been reported to the House, and copies have been placed in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

House Purchase

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made with negotiations with estate agents to help promote better practices in connection with house purchase; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I shall shortly be completing a wide-ranging programme of discussions with the leading estate agency bodies and other interested parties to consider the practices of estate agents in the operation of the property transfer system. The Government's interim conclusions on the relevant issues were outlined in a recent speech given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I have placed copies of the text of this speech in the House Library for reference.

Manufacturing

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the latest industrial trends on overseas order books for manufacturing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The latest CBI monthly industrial trends survey (November) shows that export order books have weakened from the high levels seen at the beginning of the year—a balance of 4 per cent. of manufacturers considers its export order book to be below normal. However, the latest full quarterly survey (October) showed that manufacturing industry continues to be optimistic about export prospects and so far this year the volume of exports of manufactured goods has increased by some 6 per cent. compared with the same period last year.

Tobacco Factories

Mr. Parry: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many tobacco factories have been closed since 1 January 1980; where they were located; and how many jobs were lost as a result.

Mr. Atkins: No official statistics are collected on tobacco industry factory closures, nor on the number of redundancies.

The Department is aware of the following closures of tobacco factories since 1 January 1980 to date:

1981—cigarette factory (Carreras Rothmans, Rayleigh, Essex)
1983—cigarette factory (Imperial Tobacco Ltd., Stirling)
cigarette factory (Imperial Tobacco Ltd., Glasgow)
cigar factory (Imperial Tobacco Ltd., Bristol)
1984—cigarette factory (Carreras Rothmans, Basildon)
1985—cigarette factory (Gallaher, Middleton)
cigarette factory (Imperial Tobacco Ltd., Newcastle)
cigar factory (Gallaher, Lisnafillan)
1986—cigarette factory (Carreras Rothmans, Carrickfergus)
1987—cigarette factory (Imperial Tobacco Ltd., Swindon)
1988—cigarette factory (Gallaher, Belfast)

Takeovers

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what procedures have to be followed should a company, asked to enter into assurances not to buy shares in a particular company following a Monopolies and Mergers Commission refusal to allow a takeover, seek to be released from such assurances.

Mr. Maude: The Director General of Fair Trading will advise the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on whether undertakings given following a Monopolies and Mergers Commission report should be varied or superseded, in accordance with section 88(4) of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Lawnmowers

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether two-stroke and four-stroke lawnmower engines can be converted to run on unleaded petrol.

Mr. Atkins: All petrol-driven two and four-stroke engines in lawnmowers currently on sale in the United Kingdom can be run on unleaded petrol without requiring conversion.

Shares

Mr. Favell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether his Department is considering any proposals to enable shares to be held, and transferred, without the need for share certificates.

Mr. Maude: My Department has just published a consultative paper on possible changes to the law which, if both the company and shareholder wished, would enable shares to be held on computer, without certificates, and to be transferred without the need for paper transfer forms. I have arranged for a copy of the paper to be placed in the Library of the House.

Lloyd's

Mr. Favell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made by Lloyd's in the implementation of the recommendations of the committee of inquiry into regulatory arrangements at Lloyd's.

Mr. Maude: The chairman of Lloyd's recently submitted a memorandum recording Lloyd's progress to date. This shows that, of the 69 recommendations which were for Lloyd's to implement, it has implemented or is in the course of implementing all but nine. Work on these is still in hand and we will continue to monitor Lloyd's progress towards their early implementation. A copy of the memorandum has today been placed in the Library.

Electric Bulbs

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the current levels of sales of home-produced and imported low-energy and long-life electric light bulbs.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 30 November 1988]:* This information is not available as official statistics do not separately identify these types of lamps.

EMPLOYMENT

Benefit Fraud

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his Department's initiative to counter unemployment benefit fraud.

Mr. Lee: The White Paper "Training for Employment" issued earlier this year outlined the importance the Government place on ensuring that benefits are paid only to those entitled to receive them and re-emphasised our determination to reduce fraudulent claims.

To this end my Department has increased its resources devoted to fraud detection, particularly in London and the south-east where a new inner London fraud team is being set up.

There are more investigations being conducted into the hidden economy—over 223,000 in the first half of 1988-89 compared with 185,000 for the same period in 1987-88—with particular emphasis on targeting collusive employers.

There is also an increasing level of co-operation between my Department and the Department of Social Security and the Inland Revenue on the investigation of fraudulent benefit claims.

Rural Areas

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the steps his Department is taking to relieve unemployment in rural areas.

Mr. Lee: My Department is playing its part with other interested Departments to foster improvements in the economy of rural areas, notably through encouraging and supporting enterprise, small businesses and tourism. In addition, the full range of our employment, enterprise and training measures are available to help unemployed people in all rural areas.

Benefits (Registration)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people drawing unemployment benefit are not registered at jobcentres as job seekers.

Mr. Lee: Since the introduction of voluntary registration in October 1982, unemployed job-seekers are still required to be available for work, but are no longer required to register at jobcentres as a pre-condition for claiming unemployment. Certain categories of job-seekers are still offered registration but detailed statistics are no longer collected.

Job Creation (Southwark and Bermondsey)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action his Department intends to take to ensure the creation and retention of jobs for local people in the Southwark and Bermondsey constituency.

Mr. Lee: My Department, through its employment service and Training Agency, operates a wide range of employment, enterprise and training measures, which are all available in Southwark and Bermondsey, as well as elsewhere.

In addition, the Docklands liaison group co-ordinates the local activities of the employment service and the Training Agency and helps to streamline links with local organisations, with the aim of helping local unemployed people take advantage of the many new opportunities which the regeneration of the London docklands is providing. An employment training project to train local people in construction skills has recently opened in Southwark. This will build up to 175 places.

During the 12 months to October 1988 unemployment in Southwark and Bermondsey has fallen by 910, 13·5 per cent. of the October 1987 figure.

Restart Interviews

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will give, for the Coventry and Warwickshire area and nationally *(a)* the numbers called each months for a restart interview, since the inception of the scheme, broken down by gender and, where available, age range, *(b)* the numbers that attended the interviews, *(c)* the numbers of non-attenders who received a second invitation indicating the consequences of non-attendance regarding eligibility for benefit and *(d)* the numbers who did not attend for interview after the second letter; and of these, how many subsequently were declared ineligible for benefit;

(2) if he will give, for the Coventry and Warwickshire area and nationally, the numbers of people called each month for a restart interview since the inception of the scheme, broken down by gender and, where available, age range, who subsequently were *(a)* offered and *(b)* accepted: (i) a job, (ii) a community programme placement, (iii) a place on a restart course, (iv) a job training scheme placement, (v) referral to a job club, (vi) referral to enterprise allowance, (vii) referral to VPP projects, (viii) referral to employment training, (ix) other training, by type, and (x) other schemes, by type.

Mr. Lee: The figures are not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Tourism

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consultations he has had, or plans to have, with tourist authorities as part of his current review of tourism.

Mr. Lee: I have had meetings with the chairman and boards of the BTA and ETB to discuss the review. The review team has also had wide-ranging consultations with national, regional and local tourist bodies.

YTS

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of young people, both nationally and in south Yorkshire, who are currently unemployed and who currently have not found or been offered a place on YTS.

Mr. Cope: This information is not available. Only the local careers service will know the number of young people seeking a YTS place at any one time.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 16 to 18-year-olds have been offered a YTS placement; how many remain to be contacted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: From 1 April to 31 October, the latest available date, it is estimated that 266,700 young people have joined YTS. No information is available on the numbers who have declined a placement. At the end of October more than 435,000 young people were in training on YTS providing them with a sound foundation training for their future working lives.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the number of 16 to 18-year-olds who have accepted offers on a YTS placement; how many have declined a placement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: This information is not available. Only the local authority careers services will have any indication of the numbers involved. However, I am satisfied that the Training Agency has made available more than sufficient places to meet the potential uptake.

Teenagers

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what provision is made for difficult-to-place teenagers; what measures are being considered to increase the level of provision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: There are more than sufficient premium places on YTS to cater for difficult-to-place young people. The scope of funding for the disabled has been widened to include, for example, young people with emotional or behavioural problems. YTS initial training has been introduced for those young people who need a period of preparation and assessment before entering mainstream YTS. Places for difficult young people are also available on community industry.

I believe that these increased measures provide a valuable foundation at the start of their working lives for young people with difficulties.

Mr. Samuel Thomas Antonelli

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether Samuel Thomas Antonelli, a United States citizen resident at 147B Clapton Common, London E5 9AE is in possession of a valid work permit.

Mr. Lee: There is no record of a work permit being issued for this person.

HEALTH

Nurses (Grading)

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of clinical nursing and midwifery staff have been assimilated to each of the new clinical grades by district and by region in England.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information requested is given in the table.

Variations between regions and districts are accounted for by such factors as:

(i) differences in the pattern of service provision, including the balance between hospital and community care;

(ii) differences in the composition of the nursing and midwifery workforce at 1 April 1988, including the proportions of unqualified staff and of first and second level qualified nurses;

(iii) differences in the number and size of hospitals, including long-stay psychiatric hospitals, within each authority.

The new clinical grading structure for nursing, midwifery and health visitor staff within each district and RHA—England
Percentages of all clinical staff assimilated to each of the new clinical grades on the basis of duties and responsibilities on 1 April 1988

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
Northern										
Hartlepool	16·0	0·7	18·9	11·1	24·0	10·8	16·0	2·5	—	676·00
North Tees	15·8	4·1	14·7	13·5	26·5	5·7	16·4	2·7	0·7	1,037·00
South Tees	16·3	2·6	5·3	24·5	23·8	11·7	12·5	1·7	1·5	2,343·00
East Cumbria	22·7	1·7	15·3	13·7	23·3	6·0	14·0	2·0	1·3	1,319·00
South Cumbria	23·8	1·1	15·6	14·5	18·4	4·7	17·8	2·6	1·6	1,010·00
West Cumbria	25·1	3·1	6·3	21·0	18·6	5·9	15·5	3·1	1·3	979·00
Darlington	16·8	5·4	16·1	22·8	18·3	3·4	13·2	3·8	0·1	1,042·00
Durham	20·9	1·9	10·6	21·4	16·9	5·4	19·9	2·2	0·8	1,067·00
North West Durham	21·9	0·2	7·4	21·3	23·3	8·9	14·9	1·2	1·0	597·00
South West Durham	29·4	0·8	1·1	23·0	20·7	8·3	13·3	2·8	0·5	1,321·00
Northumberland	34·1	1·2	13·2	11·1	14·0	7·6	15·7	2·0	1·0	2,836·00
Gateshead	23·7	1·6	9·6	20·4	17·1	7·7	16·7	2·5	0·8	1,237·00
Newcastle	17·8	2·4	12·0	23·7	20·0	7·8	12·4	2·4	1·4	4,253·00

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
North Tyneside	18·3	1·4	11·7	16·2	18·8	8·6	20·8	2·5	1·5	845·00
South Tyneside	24·9	1·5	11·1	15·6	19·4	6·6	17·8	2·1	0·8	846·00
Sunderland	20·3	1·5	13·1	15·8	22·0	6·9	17·0	3·1	0·3	2,117·00
Blood Transfusion	86·8	—	4·4	4·4	1·5	—	1·5	1·5	—	68·00
Total	22·2	2·0	11·2	18·7	19·9	7·5	15·1	2·4	1·0	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
Yorkshire										
Hull	22·3	2·8	7·9	18·9	19·6	6·9	16·9	2·5	2·2	2,082·00
East Yorkshire	25·8	1·4	14·3	20·1	15·5	5·2	15·0	1·5	1·2	1,565·30
Grimsby	22·1	1·9	14·2	15·1	18·7	8·9	16·4	1·7	1·1	1,116·60
Scunthorpe	22·6	2·2	15·6	14·8	15·3	8·9	15·9	2·3	2·3	1,086·60
Northallerton	18·6	2·3	5·7	13·7	15·5	14·6	20·8	3·3	5·5	394·00
York	25·8	2·8	9·2	14·2	24·2	5·4	14·8	3·1	0·6	1,823·90
Scarborough	16·6	3·2	11·4	16·9	18·8	10·3	18·1	4·4	0·4	800·40
Harrogate	26·6	2·5	11·5	13·1	19·0	7·4	15·7	2·9	1·2	977·40
Bradford	21·4	2·7	14·3	15·4	18·1	7·8	16·0	3·0	1·5	2,436·50
Airedale	30·1	1·2	13·9	11·8	15·7	7·5	16·0	2·2	1·6	1,192·00
Calderdale	20·8	3·1	14·8	12·8	18·4	6·3	17·1	4·2	2·4	1,279·70
Huddersfield	22·9	1·9	19·0	15·2	16·4	5·5	14·8	3·4	0·8	1,603·80
Dewsbury	17·5	2·0	16·1	18·6	17·4	5·5	19·0	2·3	1·7	862·50
Leeds Western	24·4	2·0	10·1	20·2	18·3	10·1	11·6	2·1	1·2	2,841·40
Leeds Eastern	19·7	2·6	6·3	22·3	23·1	8·8	13·8	1·0	2·3	2,674·20
Wakefield	25·5	0·8	17·9	13·4	11·6	11·8	14·4	2·7	2·0	1,674·60
Pontefract	20·3	2·1	15·7	17·6	14·9	7·6	17·3	1·9	2·8	1,009·10
Blood Transfusion	82·4	5·3	—	4·4	4·4	—	0·9	1·8	0·9	113·50
Total	23·1	2·2	12·4	16·7	18·1	7·9	15·3	2·5	1·6	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
Trent										
North Derbyshire	29·3	3·0	6·0	15·5	17·7	8·6	15·0	2·1	2·8	1,879·2
Southern Derbyshire	25·4	2·7	10·2	16·0	15·8	10·7	13·4	4·0	1·6	3,365·89
Leicestershire	22·7	3·9	9·8	20·2	17·9	6·6	14·4	2·2	2·2	5,868·59
North Linconshire	23·3	4·9	10·8	15·6	19·8	6·6	14·8	2·4	1·8	1,991·54
South Linconshire	27·0	3·8	8·2	13·4	18·1	7·2	17·8	3·0	1·6	1,824·22
Bassetlaw	26·4	1·8	13·0	16·6	16·2	12·5	10·1	3·1	0·3	612·12
Central Nottinghamshire	26·4	1·7	13·3	15·7	15·8	8·9	14·2	2·5	1·6	2,087·30
Nottingham	23·4	3·0	3·5	24·2	18·8	7·7	15·3	2·3	1·7	4,896·04
Barnsley	21·8	2·5	17·7	16·4	16·4	8·8	12·3	2·9	1·3	1,431·52
Doncaster	23·5	2·3	16·2	17·9	15·8	8·4	11·9	2·4	1·6	2,274·73
Rotherham	28·6	1·5	11·4	19·3	10·3	9·1	15·5	1·9	2·4	1,572·68
Sheffield	22·9	3·7	5·9	19·9	22·6	8·9	11·6	2·1	2·4	5,570·23
Blood Transfusion	88·4	7·4	1·1	—	—	2·1	—	1·1	—	95·00
Total	24·5	3·2	9·1	18·6	17·9	8·3	13·9	2·5	1·9	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
East Anglia										
Cambridge	17·3	5·1	5·2	18·8	24·9	10·0	13·3	2·7	2·6	2,151·36
Peterbrough	24·9	4·5	7·6	16·4	18·3	8·1	14·3	3·2	2·6	1,407·00
West Suffolk	26·8	4·8	5·7	21·0	17·0	3·3	16·2	2·6	2·5	1,386·99
East Suffolk	28·5	4·4	8·4	14·4	20·7	4·1	14·6	2·4	2·3	2,268·26
Norwich	26·4	4·9	4·8	20·0	20·5	7·5	12·7	1·7	1·3	3,520·92
Great Yarmouth & Waveney	29·0	4·2	8·0	20·1	13·8	6·7	15·0	1·6	1·6	1,288·10
West Norfolk & Wisbech	26·0	2·6	9·1	19·7	17·0	6·6	14·8	2·3	1·9	1,120·73
Huntingdon	15·7	1·3	11·8	22·0	21·9	6·8	15·3	2·9	2·5	751·18
Blood Transfusion	87·0	8·3	—	—	—	2·6	—	2·1	—	48·27
Total	25·1	4·4	6·8	18·8	19·6	6·8	14·1	2·3	2·1	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
North West Thames										
North Bedfordshire	26·5	2·9	6·1	18·8	15·1	7·1	18·4	2·1	3·0	1,230·84
South Bedfordshire	19·6	5·5	7·4	13·3	23·7	10·4	16·3	1·8	2·0	1,709·68
North Hertfordshire	13·0	2·5	2·7	19·9	32·6	6·1	19·1	3·6	0·4	763·95
East Hertfordshire	24·6	3·5	2·5	14·5	17·4	11·5	20·2	4·7	1·2	985·20
North West Hertfordshire	27·0	13·8	3·1	13·8	19·3	8·3	11·9	2·4	0·4	3,013·16
South West Hertfordshire	18·6	3·5	6·0	16·7	21·9	10·7	17·4	3·9	1·3	979·00
Barnet	24·6	2·9	5·6	17·3	23·3	9·0	13·5	1·7	2·1	2,293·77
Harrow	12·8	1·9	10·1	22·5	23·8	9·8	13·0	4·2	1·9	1,158·30
Hillingdon	15·1	1·4	11·5	19·0	24·2	11·4	13·4	3·0	0·8	1,805·00
Hounslow and Spelthorne	15·0	2·8	12·0	16·2	23·5	8·0	17·7	3·6	1·3	1,664·39
Ealing	18·8	1·9	11·7	19·4	21·2	6·2	16·4	3·3	1·1	1,471·09
Parkside	15·3	2·2	10·6	19·3	25·5	10·6	13·3	2·0	1·4	3,259·95
Riverside	11·5	2·7	10·6	18·4	26·2	11·8	12·8	3·4	2·6	3,158·35
Blood Transfusion	70·6	8·9	4·3	5·4	2·5	4·2		2·5	1·7	119·42
Total	18·9	4·2	8·1	17·4	23·0	9·5	14·6	2·8	1·5	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
North East Thames										
Basildon and Thurrock	22·8	11·9	6·1	15·1	17·1	7·9	14·6	2·9	1·6	1,939·70
Mid Essex	17·5	10·4	9·8	19·3	18·1	7·1	14·0	2·0	1·9	1,656·00
North East Essex	20·7	12·1	8·4	16·9	17·7	6·5	12·1	2·8	2·7	2,699·30
West Essex	27·9	2·5	8·9	15·9	13·9	9·5	16·7	2·1	2·5	3,329·50
Southend	22·9	4·0	8·5	19·3	18·7	9·0	13·8	2·5	1·2	1,802·54
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	23·6	3·4	8·0	21·4	15·3	7·5	15·1	3·1	2·7	2,589·00
Hampstead	17·1	2·2	5·7	23·2	21·8	14·5	10·6	2·1	2·7	1,678·35
Bloomsbury	5·2	2·4	7·4	33·6	21·4	9·9	12·4	5·5	2·2	2,467·70
Islington	11·0	2·2	8·4	21·8	22·8	8·0	17·9	3·3	4·4	1,160·40
City and Hackney	12·6	2·1	7·3	27·0	20·2	9·0	14·9	4·6	2·2	1,846·01
Newham	18·9	7·1	10·5	11·8	22·8	6·4	17·1	3·0	2·3	1,275·30
Tower Hamlets	14·1	2·3	3·4	20·4	27·9	11·6	15·9	3·6	0·8	1510·90
Enfield	20·8	3·8	7·8	18·5	20·0	7·3	17·5	2·5	1·8	1,404·60
Haringey	9·9	2·0	15·3	23·2	18·8	8·8	17·5	3·1	1·3	1,361·80
Redbridge	22·7	1·8	7·4	21·9	20·7	7·0	10·7	5·5	2·3	1,510·80
Waltham Forest	12·9	6·4	9·0	24·5	19·5	8·6	14·3	2·4	2·6	2,286·50
Blood Transfusion	74·0	6·0	2·2	3·8	—	7·7	4·4	1·9	—	104·44
Total	17·7	5·1	8·1	21·3	19·5	8·6	14·3	3·2	2·2	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
South East Thames										
Brighton	16·9	4·9	8·3	22·1	15·2	10·2	18·5	1·7	2·1	1,994·94
Eastbourne	23·8	6·4	8·3	11·1	17·7	9·1	18·5	2·9	2·1	1,458·50
Hastings	25·4	5·4	10·8	8·9	19·3	8·5	17·5	2·8	1·4	1,136·09
South East Kent	22·4	4·6	10·7	10·8	20·3	8·6	18·0	2·8	1·9	1,299·47
Canterbury and Thanet	19·8	8·0	8·7	18·5	18·0	9·3	13·6	2·3	1·9	2,412·41
Dartford and Gravesham	22·4	4·8	12·9	13·1	18·5	9·4	13·7	4·1	1·0	1,665·32
Maidstone	21·5	5·7	10·7	14·8	18·8	11·2	12·6	2·5	2·1	1,515·29
Medway	16·6	3·1	6·4	20·5	21·8	8·0	18·9	2·0	2·7	1,464·73
Tunbridge Wells	32·4	3·0	6·9	14·2	18·8	7·8	13·3	2·2	1·6	1,826·41
Bexley	21·2	4·3	11·3	16·1	18·5	9·4	14·4	2·5	2·3	1,383·28
Greenwich	14·4	4·2	8·3	19·4	21·1	11·4	14·9	4·5	1·7	1,750·19
Bromley	21·4	5·6	13·8	11·8	19·6	10·1	13·7	2·2	1·7	2,133·23
West Lambeth	9·7	2·3	12·5	24·4	22·5	10·6	13·5	2·9	1·5	2.013·59
Camberwell	14·6	2·1	7·6	20·7	21·2	12·4	15·4	4·0	2·0	1,712·11
Lewisham and North Southwark	12·9	5·3	8·6	21·6	17·7	14·2	14·4	2·8	2·5	3,396·42
Blood Transfusion	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		—	—
Total	18·9	4·7	9·6	17·3	19·1	10·3	15·1	2·8	2·1	—

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
South West Thames										
North West Surrey	23·6	7·1	9·3	15·6	15·5	9·1	13·6	3·5	2·6	1,573·57
West Surrey and North East Hampshire	22·7	2·9	7·1	17·1	21·0	5·6	18·9	2·4	2·3	1,216·67
South West Surrey	24·3	3·8	7·5	14·0	21·5	8·8	14·9	2·8	2·4	1,519·38
Mid Surrey	24·0	4·6	6·5	17·1	16·6	10·1	15·0	3·1	3·0	1,556·48
East Surrey	25·4	5·7	4·6	14·5	17·7	11·6	15·0	2·9	2·5	1,612·13
Chichester	24·0	3·6	5·8	15·5	22·6	8·3	15·1	2·7	2·4	1,178·31
Mid Downs	21·6	3·4	4·8	15·2	21·6	9·0	19·0	2·4	3·0	1,546·76
Worthing	21·4	6·4	7·0	20·0	15·7	6·1	16·8	3·3	3·4	1,276·00
Croyden	22·6	9·0	6·4	19·7	15·1	8·3	13·5	2·9	2·5	2,103·47
Kingston and Esher	20·2	1·8	5·9	19·9	19·3	14·3	12·9	2·6	3·1	1,292·26
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	18·7	4·8	7·2	21·9	19·4	7·1	15·6	3·9	1·5	1,212·23
Wandsworth	13·1	1·9	13·5	27·0	17·6	10·0	11·8	2·1	3·0	2,590·87
Merton and Sutton	21·6	6·4	9·1	19·4	14·4	10·7	13·5	2·4	2·5	2,406·69
Blood Transfusion	86·4	6·9	—	1·7	2·4	1·7	0·9	—	—	116·30
Total	21·8	4·8	7·6	18·6	17·8	9·3	14·6	2·8	2·6	—

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
Wessex										
East Dorset	26·1	4·9	7·3	15·1	20·5	6·3	15·1	2·6	2·1	2,841·20
West Dorset	33·0	5·4	12·0	9·5	17·4	6·7	13·7	1·6	0·7	1,591·14
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	25·5	6·5	5·3	14·2	21·5	6·1	16·3	2·8	1·7	3,323·10
Southampton and South West Hampshire	26·4	2·5	5·8	17·7	21·0	7·6	14·5	3·2	1·3	3,637·77
Winchester	20·7	10·1	4·5	19·3	16·8	5·5	16·4	5·2	1·6	1,196·57
Basingstoke and North Hampshire	24·6	5·4	5·0	18·9	15·9	10·0	13·6	4·3	2·3	1,563·31
Salisbury	25·0	5·5	5·9	16·8	19·3	6·8	15·1	3·2	2·3	1,113·23
Swindon	18·6	11·4	9·6	15·2	19·2	5·5	15·7	3·2	1·5	1,613·25
Bath	27·0	5·6	3·2	19·9	16·3	5·1	18·7	2·3	1·9	2,782·79
Isle of Wight	21·7	7·9	7·3	13·0	23·2	7·6	13·4	3·9	1·9	832·58
Blood Transfusion	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	25·4	5·9	6·3	16·1	19·2	6·7	15·5	3·0	1·8	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
Oxford										
East Berkshire	18·8	8·3	8·7	16·5	15·6	8·8	18·0	3·0	2·3	1,921·97
West Berkshire	21·0	7·2	5·0	18·2	17·5	8·7	17·1	3·3	2·0	2,448·94
Aylesbury Vale	31·7	4·1	3·9	8·2	22·6	9·6	14·3	3·6	2·0	1,410·82
Wycombe	18·2	3·8	2·5	17·2	18·0	9·4	24·0	4·2	2·7	987·70
Milton Keynes	16·1	2·7	17·3	13·3	17·0	4·3	23·0	3·0	3·2	683·70
Kettering	22·1	3·0	6·5	17·2	19·6	9·2	17·6	3·0	1·7	1,273·47
Northampton	21·6	4·3	4·5	17·3	22·7	11·0	14·1	2·3	2·4	2,042·92
Oxfordshire	18·3	8·8	5·5	14·8	20·7	11·9	13·8	3·0	3·1	3,593·90
Blood Transfusion	85·1	7·8	—	—	1·6	2·5	3·1	—	—	64·31
TOTAL	21·1	6·2	6·0	15·6	19·4	9·8	16·4	3·1	2·4	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
South Western										
Bristol and Weston	15·7	5·3	5·0	19·7	25·6	8·8	13·7	3·4	2·8	2,944·29
Frenchay	34·5	2·6	9·6	20·6	11·8	6·7	11·7	1·3	1·2	2,324·80
Southmead	23·9	9·4	3·2	15·3	20·3	8·6	16·1	1·6	1·6	1,742·35
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	26·8	5·9	3·4	14·7	19·2	10·6	13·8	3·7	1·8	2,570·79
Exeter	28·4	9·3	5·9	11·9	22·3	6·3	12·6	1·0	2·4	3,020·56
North Devon	27·9	5·4	6·3	9·6	23·3	8·9	15·5	2·4	0·7	849·23
Plymouth	22·1	2·3	8·7	19·6	24·5	5·4	13·7	2·0	1·7	2,624·32
Torbay	25·5	8·9	6·8	16·3	16·8	6·2	15·9	2·5	0·9	1,572·69
Cheltenham	29·4	2·9	6·2	16·0	17·7	9·7	15·0	1·4	1·7	1,200·13
Gloucester	23·9	5·0	10·5	11·4	20·7	9·0	15·2	1·4	2·8	2,203·76
Somerset	30·8	4·7	5·0	16·1	17·9	5·7	15·8	2·8	1·2	2,748·18

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
Blood Transfusion	71·7	3·9	15·9	0·6	2·6	1·3	2·6	—	1·3	76·20
Total	26·1	5·6	6·4	15·9	20·2	7·6	14·2	2·2	1·8	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
West Midlands										
Bromsgrove and Redditch	17·2	7·6	15·7	20·3	14·7	5·6	15·8	2·1	1·1	1,097·36
Herefordshire	26·0	6·6	8·1	11·3	19·4	9·2	14·4	4·1	0·7	1,123·55
Kidderminster and District	38·9	3·9	8·9	12·3	13·3	8·5	10·9	2·0	1·4	1,181·11
Worcester and District	26·3	5·5	7·5	15·0	15·9	10·0	16·4	1·9	1·4	1,572·26
Shropshire	25·7	1·9	5·9	22·6	16·4	5·0	18·0	2·4	2·0	2,404·43
Mid Staffordshire	18·4	1·2	14·6	11·0	22·8	9·6	16·8	3·9	1·8	1,458·25
North Staffordshire	21·3	3·1	13·8	22·1	13·1	10·3	13·5	2·1	0·7	3,826·75
South East Staffordshire	24·2	1·4	12·9	18·7	15·3	9·5	14·1	2·1	1·8	1,654·95
Rugby	22·0	3·3	13·6	15·1	20·3	5·3	14·6	2·8	3·0	429·14
North Warwickshire	28·4	6·0	7·2	14·9	18·3	7·4	14·4	2·8	0·6	1,404·72
South Warwickshire	29·7	3·8	4·6	18·5	16·4	7·6	14·1	2·8	2·5	1,654·62
Central Birmingham	17·5	2·6	9·4	17·2	20·8	15·0	12·9	2·5	2·1	2,596·40
East Birmingham	17·9	6·1	7·6	16·0	19·6	8·6	17·6	3·6	2·9	1,167·90
North Birmingham	23·1	4·0	11·4	16·8	16·2	9·3	14·5	2·9	1·6	1,220·52
South Birmingham	24·8	2·2	11·6	23·4	11·4	9·2	13·3	2·6	1·4	2,592·47
West Birmingham	25·2	2·9	4·1	23·7	15·9	11·7	13·1	2·6	0·8	2,161·39
Coventry	23·4	3·2	8·6	22·2	16·9	5·8	14·7	3·2	2·1	2,188·32
Dudley	24·2	3·3	12·5	19·8	9·8	10·7	15·8	2·9	0·9	1,875·75
Sandwell	19·1	4·3	14·5	16·2	14·2	7·6	18·0	3·1	3·1	1,328·28
Solihull	22·2	3·6	8·8	16·8	14·7	12·8	16·4	2·5	2·3	1,165·02
Walsall	29·6	3·2	10·2	16·3	11·9	9·5	13·9	4·0	1·3	1,709·08
Wolverhampton	26·5	1·9	13·5	18·8	13·1	8·6	13·7	2·5	1·4	1,892·92
Blood Transfusion	90·0	7·3	—	—	—	0·9	0·9	—	0·9	110·00
Total	24·2	3·4	10·1	18·6	15·5	9·2	14·7	2·7	1·6	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
Mersey										
Chester	20·7	3·2	13·0	22·4	13·6	11·6	12·3	1·3	1·9	1,427·00
Crewe	26·6	3·4	9·2	23·6	13·2	6·2	14·3	2·4	1·0	1,442·00
Halton	30·7	4·4	10·6	12·3	14·7	5·9	17·6	1·7	2·0	641·00
Macclesfield	26·9	4·7	3·5	18·4	18·8	7·4	14·7	4·1	1·5	1,303·00
Warrington	33·4	2·7	16·3	13·4	10·7	10·1	11·0	1·4	1·2	1,988·00
Liverpool	21·5	4·0	6·9	23·4	13·8	9·7	16·7	2·6	1·3	4,246·00
St. Helens and Knowsley	25·4	4·4	13·1	15·7	14·9	10·1	12·5	2·3	1·5	2,299·00
Southport and Formby	30·6	2·9	8·9	15·9	16·4	9·7	12·7	2·7	0·3	1,002·00
South Sefton	24·8	1·1	10·2	20·7	15·7	10·8	13·0	2·4	1·4	1,849·00
Wirral	24·5	1·4	11·4	15·9	15·6	10·0	17·3	1·9	1·9	2,333·00
Blood Transfusion	75·7	5·7	—	—	11·4	2·9	1·4	2·9	—	70·00
Total	25·7	3·2	10·2	18·9	15·0	9·0	14·4	2·3	1·4	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
North Western										
Lancaster	27·6	8·4	5·9	15·3	18·9	7·1	13·6	1·2	2·0	1,858·72
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	28·2	4·4	7·4	17·8	15·3	9·3	15·2	1·7	0·8	2,183·50
Preston	21·6	4·0	11·5	20·3	19·2	10·7	9·7	1·5	1·6	2,183·00
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	19·9	3·1	10·2	18·8	15·8	12·2	15·3	3·0	1·7	1,784·42
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	22·9	11·0	11·3	13·5	18·7	6·6	12·7	1·8	1·5	2,938·00
West Lancashire	20·1	3·0	10·0	17·6	19·1	8·4	16·9	4·4	0·5	761·80
Chorley and South Ribble	18·5	5·6	10·8	13·8	12·3	10·0	24·1	3·1	1·8	619·73
Bolton	21·3	4·5	6·7	21·8	16·2	7·8	17·4	2·7	1·7	1,666·59
Bury	21·5	4·4	6·3	21·4	13·2	8·9	19·8	2·6	1·9	953·94
North Manchester	20·1	3·2	8·0	13·6	26·4	8·8	15·8	2·5	1·7	2,104·88
Central Manchester	14·4	2·6	9·7	26·0	19·5	9·3	14·1	2·3	2·0	1,857·58

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
South Manchester	21·5	3·0	8·1	24·8	12·5	13·1	12·7	2·3	2·1	2,594·80
Oldham	20·6	3·9	9·1	7·2	22·9	11·0	21·7	2·5	1·1	1,187·51
Rochdale	19·0	6·7	7·7	11·5	21·6	9·3	19·0	3·4	1·8	1,039·27
Salford	27·4	3·2	6·6	17·7	19·1	8·5	12·6	2·5	2·5	2,899·34
Stockport	25·1	1·3	3·4	23·8	12·2	12·6	15·2	3·2	3·1	1,989·47
Tameside and Glossop	22·4	2·8	5·1	16·9	17·1	10·3	20·0	3·3	2·1	1,236·44
Trafford	20·3	4·4	8·7	8·3	21·2	12·5	18·2	3·6	2·9	988·43
Wigan	20·7	2·2	10·7	14·3	20·8	10·2	17·2	2·0	1·8	1,851·80
Blood Transfusion	80·7	9·3	—	—	5·0	1·7	1·7	0·8	0·8	120·87
Total	22·5	4·4	8·2	17·6	18·0	9·7	15·2	2·4	1·9	

Region and district	*Percentage movement to each grade*									*Staff in post (whole time equivalents)*
	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*	
SHAs										
The Hospital for Sick Children	6·3	5·6	2·9	28·6	27·9	9·5	10·7	4·1	4·4	954·66
The National Hospitals for Nervous Diseases	14·3	0·9	2·3	19·9	39·2	6·9	11·2	2·6	2·8	429·10
Moorfields Eye Hospital	4·4	—	0·7	38·1	21·1	13·7	13·3	5·9	2·6	270·00
Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospitals	17·8	0·9	11·3	15·2	34·1	5·0	9·6	4·0	2·0	697·66
The National Heart and Chest Hospitals	6·8	0·5	8·6	33·7	25·8	9·2	9·6	4·7	1·1	757·90
The Royal Marsden Hospital	0·8	—	2·3	31·6	26·2	27·2	7·4	2·9	1·7	443·54
Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's	10·8	2·5	12·6	20·2	29·9	7·7	12·8	2·8	0·8	1,088·53
The Eastman Dental Hospital	—	—	37·5	37·5	12·5	—	12·5	—	—	8·00
Total	9·3	2·0	7·2	25·5	29·4	10·0	10·8	3·7	2·1	—

Alternative Medicine

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will take steps to establish a committee of practitioners of orthodox medicine, and acceptable forms of alternative medicine, to monitor unorthodox treatments given to sufferers of multiple sclerosis;

(2) if he will establish a registration scheme for practitioners who charge for treatment which does not comply with established practice in the medical profession, or other established bodies.

Mrs. Currie: No. Practitioners registered with the General Medical Council can offer to use any form of therapy, including any of the alternative therapies, if they consider it to be in the interests of their patients and they feel competent to provide it. Practitioners of alternative therapies who are not registered with the General Medical Council, and who are therefore not eligible to work by law within the NHS, can offer their services privately, subject only to those provisions of statute and civil law which apply.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has that applied kinesiology can benefit patients suffering from multiple sclerosis.

Mrs. Currie: None whatever.

Calderdale

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many appeals have been made by nursing staff in Calderdale against the regrading system; and how soon all these appeals will be heard.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not collect this information centrally. The question of when appeals will be heard is a local matter.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to increase the ratio of National Health Service beds to population in Calderdale to the regional average; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans he has to increase the ratio of full-time health staff to population in Calderdale to the regional average; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: None. Regional average figures of this type have no meaning. It is not possible to compare one district with another in this way because, for example, some districts have large mental illness or mental handicap hospitals which serve a number of health authorities whilst others have beds for regional or sub regional specialties. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the Yorkshire regional health authority for a more detailed explanation of the position locally.

Ambulancemen

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to the report he has received from the Ambulance Council working party entitled The Problems of Long Serving Ambulancemen; and if he will make a statement on his response to the report.

Mr. Mellor: We intend giving the contents of the final report careful consideration when it is submitted to Ministers.

Community Care

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many former psychiatric hospital patients have been transferred to the community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: In 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, 176,161 people, including readmissions during the year, were discharged from mental illness hospitals and units in England, and 1,082 of these patients had a length of stay of five years or more.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that the current level of community care facilities is sufficient to accommodate all those psychiatric hospital patients returned to the community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: It is for the consultant psychiatrists and their professional colleagues to ensure that patients' needs are assessed, and arrangements are made with local authorities and other care agencies for those needs to be met, before discharging their patients.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to increase the number of qualified medical personnel available to assess psychiatric hospital patients' needs in community care hostels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We issued planning guidelines in July this year asking health authorities to ensure that a consultant psychiatrist in each district has special responsibility for rehabilitation and continuing care. This could extend to community care hostels.

Community care is a multi-disciplinary task and other hospital professionals, as well as the primary care team, also have an important assessment role.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to make the medical reports of psychiatric hospital patients available to the community care hostels receiving these patients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Caring for mentally disordered people in the community is a multi-disciplinary task. We have stressed the need for collaborative work in this area and the importance of this has been emphasised by the findings of the committee of inquiry into the care and after care of Miss Sharon Campbell. In sharing information doctors have to be mindful of the constraints of medical confidence and respect the wishes of the patient as to how such information is shared.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate current and future needs for community care facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Current and projected need for community care facilities is one of the factors taken into account in determining the overall allocation of funding to regional health authorities and local authorities. It is for individual authorities to plan local services and resource allocation in the light of local needs and priorities.

Cook-chill Catering

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Wakefield, *Official Report*, 28 November, when Mr. Arthur Pinegar, ceased to be involved in the private health laboratory involved in work on cook-chill catering.

Mrs. Currie: About one year ago.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Wakefield, *Official Report*, 28 November, what is his policy on allowing microbiologists employed in the public health laboratory service also to operate private laboratories undertaking the evaluation and monitoring of cook-chill catering.

Mrs. Currie: The PHLs board's current policy is not to withhold permission for staff to engage in other remunerative work provided that there is no conflict of interest between that work and the employee's duties with the board, and that it does not prejudice the interests of the service.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Wakefield, *Official Report*, 28 November, where the work on the growth and survival of listeria monocytogenes in foods prepared in cook-chill catering being undertaken by the public health laboratory service is being carried out.

Mrs. Currie: At the food hygiene laboratory of the PHLS, Colindale.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Wakefield, *Official Report*, 28 November, whether the studies being undertaken by the public health laboratory service concerning the examination of meals provided in National Health Service cook-chill catering systems for the presence of listeria monocytogenes are being carried out.

Mrs. Currie: Yes.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Wakefield, *Official Report*, 28 November, why more time is needed before his Department's guidelines on cook-chill catering can be published.

Mrs. Currie: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 14 November at column *478*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the advice contained in the guidelines on cook-freeze catering published by his Department in 1970 is still operational.

Mrs. Currie: Yes. However, the reference made in these guidelines to the use of chilled pre-cooked food was superseded by the guidelines on pre-cooked chilled foods published in 1980; the latter are being updated.

Adoption

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what basis local authorities use in assessing an upper age limit for adoption; what that limit is; and whether he intends to review present arrangements governing adoptions.

Mrs. Currie: Adoption agencies, which include local authorities, are under a statutory obligation to choose the most suitable available family for each child. Age is one factor taken into account by agencies in making a decision. Agencies follow the accepted good practice that babies should generally be placed with adopters who are at an age at which most couples start a family. However, many agencies welcome prospective adopters beyond this age to meet the needs of older children or children whose care and upbringing call for experience or particular skills.

Having introduced the Children Bill we plan to turn to a reivew of the adoption legislation as soon as the opportunity occurs and will examine the present arrangements as part of that review.

Nursing Homes

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of places in *(a)* private and *(b)* voluntary nursing homes in each district health authority area in (i) 1979 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: Comparable information is available only for 1982 to 1986 (SBH212). Copies are available in the Library. The data do not separately identify voluntary and private homes. Data for 1987 should be available early next year.

European Childcare Network

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government are taking to implement the recommendations contained in the European childcare network report by Dr. Bronwen Cohen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The ministerial group on women's issues, which is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford (Mr. Patten), Minister of State, Home Office and on which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health is considering children's day care and women's employment. Dr. Cohen's report, "Caring for children—services and policies for Childcare and Equal Opportunities in the United Kingdom", which contains recommendations of interest to several Government Departments, is being considered in that context.

Registration Service

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the consultative document on the reform of the registration service.

Mrs. Currie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health today published a Green Paper entitled "Registration: a modern service", Cm. 531, containing proposals to reform the system for registering births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales.

In presenting these proposals the Government have recognised that the present 150-year-old system places severe limitations on the service and those responsible for it and that there is a need to restructure it to make it more up to date, flexible and responsive to the demands of today's public.

The Government propose that responsibilities for the management of the registration service should be clarified: local authorities would be fully responsible for managing the service while the Registrar General would set national standards for it and the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) would monitor their implementation. Other measures are proposed which the Government believe will provide a more helpful and supportive service to the public. These include a greater choice for members of the public over the registration district and the building in which they marry; a facility for registering deaths which does not require the informant to travel to the district where the death occurred; some changes in still-birth registration to help meet public concern; improvements in the statistical information collected at the time of registration; safeguards on people's ability to buy certified copies of certificates which relate to the recent births, deaths or marriages of complete strangers; and the legal changes necessary to permit access to early registration records on similar terms as to other historic records. The overall financial effect of these reforms would be to reduce the present net cost of the service both locally and centrally.

These proposals are based upon the efficiency scrutiny of the registration service in England and Wales, which reported in 1985, and on the conclusions of a joint working group of officials from OPCS and the Home Office and representatives of the local authority associations which reported earlier this year.

The majority of these proposals will require amendments to main legislation but before any legislative proposals are presented to the House the Government are inviting comments on the proposals in the Green Paper to be sent to OPCS by 31 March 1989.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce the allocations to regional health authorities from the waiting list fund for 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The Government are making a further £30 million available through the waiting list fund in 1989-90 to help tackle the problem of long waits for hospital treatment: £25 million will be allocated direct to regional health authorities so that there can fund projects aimed at reducing the time patients have to wait and the remaining £5 million will fund projects in health districts which have particular waiting problems.

This is the third phase of the waiting list initiative. Last year the £25 million fund enabled health authorities to treat some 100,000 additional in-patients/day cases and 44,000 out-patients. In 1988-89 the £30 million is enabling health authorities to treat even more additional patients from the waiting list. The further £30 million that I am announcing today represents the third year of special funding and will build on the successes already achieved.

The allocation to regions are as follows:

Region	*Allocation £ million*
Northern	1·627
Yorkshire	1·886
Trent	2·488
East Anglian	0·889
North West Thames	2·004
North East Thames	2·108
South East Thames	1·956
South West Thames	1·549
Wessex	1·358
Oxford	0·992
South Western	1·547
West Midlands	2·743
Mersey	1·445
North Western	2·407

Care of the Elderly

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by regional health authority *(a)* the number of people between 65 and 75 years old who have been identified as needing or having (i) hip replacement, (ii) cataracts, (iii) chest complaints, (iv) heart disease, (v) strokes, (vi) Parkinson's disease, (vii) Alzheimers's disease and (viii) osteo/rheumatoid arthritis and *(b)* the number of people over 75 years old who have been identified as needing or having the above.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 25 November]:* The available information is given in the table.

Estimated number of In-Patients with main diagnosis/operation (as shown), by region of residence, discharged from NHS non-psychiatric hospitals, England 1985

	Age Group	*Northern*	*Yorkshire*	*Trent*	*East Anglia*	*North West Thames*	*North East Thames*	*South East Thames*	*South West Thames*	*Wessex*	*Oxford*	*South Western*	*West Midlands*	*Mersey*	*North Western*	*England not otherwise stated*	¹*England*
Hip replacements (CSO 810, 811)	65-74	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	²11,980
	75 and over	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	²16,130
Cataracts (CSO 170-179)	65-74	710	*1,310	1,410	700	650	810	1,100	860	930	500	740	1,310	670	1,300	0	13,010
	75 and over	950	1,970	2,940	1,520	1,050	1,280	1,440	1,330	1,630	800	1,250	1,570	1,280	1,900	(10)	20,940
Diseases of the respiratory system (ICD 460-519)	65-74	4,130	5,590	5,870	1,820	4,160	4,720	3,930	2,830	2,260	2,170	3,320	6,220	3,580	6,800	(50)	57,450
	75 and over	5,470	8,560	9,820	3,570	7,180	7,140	6,820	5,250	3,710	3,820	5,730	7,640	5,270	8,640	(30)	88,660
Ischaemic heart diseases (ICD 410-414)	65-74	3,580	4,880	5,020	1,830	3,580	3,730	3,570	2,390	2,180	1,600	2,890	6,120	3,040	7,600	(10)	52,070
	75 and over	3,440	4,600	4,700	1,880	3,130	3,550	4,150	2,810	2,020	1,350	2,680	3,950	2,700	6,220	(10)	46,990
Acute but ill-defined cerebrovascular disease (ICD 436)	65-74	1,600	1,990	1,920	580	1,290	1,340	1,630	1,140	1,110	710	1,530	2,870	1,150	2,600	(20)	21,470
	75 and over	2,670	3,130	3,950	1,610	2,530	3,220	3,680	2,230	2,230	1,530	3,580	4,650	2,060	3,880	(10)	41,010
Parkinsons disease (ICD 332)	65-74	250	380	430	(90)	210	360	220	210	240	(180)	220	550	(170)	460	0	3,870
	75 and over	360	700	1,070	280	480	480	670	550	470	300	440	1,020	420	990	0	8,210
Alzheimers Disease (ICD 331·0)	65-74	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	²(60)
	75 and over	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	²(80)
Rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthrosis (ICD 714,715)	65-74	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	²21,090
	75 and over	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	²22,450

[1] England total may not equal sum of regions due to roundings.

[2] Includes patients normally resident outside England.

Figures in brackets should be treated with caution as they are based on small sample numbers.

ICD - International Classification of Diseases; 9th revision.

CSO - Classification of Surgical Operations; 3rd revision.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Incomes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the example given on page 94 of "Social Trends 18" of a family man earning £73 in April 1987.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend on 28 July 1988 at column *509*. This gives an example of a married man with a non-working wife and four children living in local authority accommodation and earning £75 during 1988-89.

Earnings Allowance

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if those achieving retirement with an established reduced earnings allowance before April 1989 will retain that allowance for life.

Mr. Scott: A recipient of the allowance who retires before 10 April 1989 will retain his existing entitlement for life.

Hostel Dwellers

Mr. Allen Adams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will give the value of the board and lodging allowance paid to hostel dwellers in April 1985, 1986 and 1988 in 1988 prices; and if he has any plans to increase the current rate;

(2) what proposals he has for raising allowances for hostel dwellers in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Hostel dwellers do not receive income support (and formerly supplementary benefit) at a fixed rate. Income support includes help towards the accommodation charge and meals subject to a maximum limit, together with a personal allowance. Personal allowances are normally increased each April along with increases in other benefits. These will be increased from 10 April 1989 as follows:

	April 1988 £	*April 1989* £
Lower		
Single	10·30	11·95
Couple	20·60	23·90
Higher		
Single	11·50	13·25
Couple	23·00	26·50
Dependant children		
under 11	3·45	4·10
age 11-15	5·30	6·05
age 16-17	6·20	7·00
age 18	10·30	11·95

There are no plans to increase the maximum hostel limit which continues to cover the majority of charges.

The following table shows the average amounts of income support (and formerly supplementary benefit) paid to hostel dwellers in cash terms and at May 1988 values. May figures are used, because information for April is not available. No figures on average payments are available before December 1985.

	Average payment £	*At May 1988 prices* £
May 1986	65·76	71·38
May 1987	67·24	70·08
May 1988	70·72	70·72

Benefit Offices

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the staffing levels for the Carlisle benefit office for each of the years from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no figures available before 1983. The staffing levels for each of the years 1983-87 were:

	Number
1983-84	117
1984-85	110
1985-86	111
1986-87	118
1987-88	117

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the Coventry and Warwickshire area have claimed unemployment benefit and satisfied all the necessary conditions of entitlement, except that of voluntary unemployment, for each month of 1988 to date; and of these how many were disqualified from unemployment benefit, broken down by age, sex and duration of disqualification.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Attendance and Mobility Allowances

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if there is any facility for claimants for the attendance and mobility allowances to be examined by a woman doctor or a doctor from a particular ethnic background.

Mr. Scott: If claimants for the attendance allowance and mobility allowance specifically request to be examined by a woman doctor or a doctor from a particular ethnic background, these requests are dealt with on an individual basis by the regional office senior medical officer. Every effort is made to meet the claimant's request but the ability to do so largely depends upon the availability of doctors meeting the requirements among the examining medical practitioners in any one locality who have been recruited and trained for the undertaking of such examinations.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many examining medical practitioners for the attendance and mobility allowances are *(a)* women and *(b)* from ethnic minorities with language skills or a particular cultural background where this is relevant.

Mr. Scott: There are 4,863 examining medical practitioners who undertaken examinations on claimants for the attendance and mobility allowances. Of these 816 are women, and 908 are from ethnic minorities with language skills or a particular cultural background.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will tabulate the number of successful applications for review of the attendance allowance and break down the figures into those who sought review because they were dissatisfied with the original decision and those who did so because their condition had deteriorated.

Mr. Scott: Figures for 1987, the latest year for which information is available, are in the following table.

Attendance allowance reviews 1987
Number of successful[1] applications by reason for review

Reason for review	*Number*
Dissatisfaction	19,190
Deterioration	23,933
Other	981
TOTAL	44,104

[1] Successful reviews include those where an allowance is awarded for the first time, those where an allowance is increased from the lower to the higher rate and those where the period covered by a certificate of attendance needs is increased.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what are the procedures for dealing with doctors who are not fulfilling their duties to claimants for mobility and attendance allowance satisfactorily;

(2) how complaints against examining doctors for attendance and mobility allowance are dealt with.

Mr. Scott: Complaints against examining doctors for attendance and mobility allowance are dealt with by the Department's senior medical officer in the appropriate regional office. The doctor is provided with a copy of the complaint and of the report of the examination concerned and is asked to comment. The senior medical officer considers the complaint, the doctor's reply, any previous complaints made against that doctor and the SMO's personal knowledge of the doctor. The SMO then decides what action to take and arranges for a reply to be sent to the complainant.

Dissatisfaction with the work of an examining medical practitioner may arise as a result of complaints or during the course of monitoring his or her work. There are two main causes for dissatisfaction, inadequacy of the reports or a defect in the doctor's conduct, manner or behaviour. In the former case the unsatisfactory reports are discussed with the doctor in detail by the SMO or a full-time medical officer. Deficiencies are pointed out and the doctor is advised how his work can be improved. The doctor's subsequent reports are monitored and if they fail to reach a satisfactory standard, and if it is clear that no further significant improvement can be expected, he or she is not asked to provide any further reports.

If the doctor's conduct is cause for complaint individual cases are discussed in detail. Advice is given by the SMO or MO on how a change of conduct might prevent further complaints. A doctor whose conduct continues to provoke complaints is not asked to provide further reports.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if there is any matching of doctors with particular specialisations and attendance and mobility allowances claimants with particular disabilities.

Mr. Scott: The medical criteria to be met for attendance allowance and mobility allowance are not dependent on the claimant's exhibiting any particular disabilities. The Attendance Allowance Board, or its delegate, decides whether the conditions for attendance allowance are met on the basis of a report of an examination of the disabled person undertaken by a registered medical practitioner. That report provides an assessment of the nature and extent of attention to bodily functions and/or of supervision to avoid substantial danger which the disabled person reasonably requires from another by day and/or by night by reason of the medical condition(s) from which the claimant suffers. The decision by an adjudication officer to award mobility allowance rests on an examination and assessment by an examining medical practitioner of the claimant's walking difficulties due to a physical disorder.

By their very nature the medical examinations required for the purposes of determining eligibility for these allowances need the expertise and experience possessed by general practitioners who make up the great majority of the doctors selected and recruited by the regional office senior medical officer to perform this function. Consistency of advice across a wide range of disabilities and age-groups is also desirable. This is obtained by employing general medical practitioners. In the small number of cases where a specialist opinion is required to determine diagnosis, or assist in resolving complex cases, an independent report is solicited from a consultant clinician who would possess the necessary specialist knowledge applicable to the individual case.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give *(a)* the total number of claims for mobility allowance in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 for Scotland, England and Wales, *(b)* average lengths of time involved in processing these claims, *(c)* the length of time considered reasonable for an individual claim to be processed and *(d)* the total number of applications which remain to be processed to payments or refusal stage claims first submitted in the period 1 April 1987 to 31 March 1988.

Mr. Scott: The available information about the numbers of mobility allowance claims received is in the table; separate figures for Scotland, England and Wales are not available as claims are administered centrally. We endeavour to deal with all claims as quickly as possible but it is unlikely that the current average processing time of 7·8 weeks can be significantly reduced. I regret that figures for claims received up to 31 March 1988 and awaiting decision are not available.

Mobility allowance: Claims received 1985-86 to 1987-88

	Numbers received
1985-86	151,000
1986-87	169,000
1987-88	223,000

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give *(a)* the total number of claims for attendance allowance in each of the years 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 for Scotland, England and Wales, *(b)* the average length of time involved in processing an individual claim, *(c)* the length of time considered reasonable by the Department for an individual claim to be processed and *(d)* the total number of applications which remain to be processed to payment or refusal stage for claims first submitted in the period 1 April 1987 to 31 March 1988.

Mr. Scott: The information requested about numbers of attendance allowance claims received is in the table. We endeavour to deal with all claims as quickly as possible but it is unlikely that the current average processing time of 7·3 weeks can be significantly reduced. I regret that figures for claims received up to 31 March 1988 and awaiting decision are not available.

Attendance allowance: Claims received 1985-86 to 1987-88

	Numbers received		
	Scotland	*England*	*Wales*
1985-86	24,063	230,434	21,969
1986-87	26,897	246,650	23,620
1987-88	31,266	280,969	25,628

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people now receiving the reduced earnings allowance were awarded this payment when it was known as the special hardship allowance; and what undertakings were given to those recipients as to the duration of these payments.

Mr. Scott: I regret that the information requested is not available. Special hardship allowance was awarded for a period of up to six years subject to review if circumstances changed.

Family Credit

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what assumptions about take-up rates the provision for family credit in the 1988 public expenditure White Paper was based.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The estimates of 470,000 family credit claimants and expenditure of £409 million were based on the assumption that the proportion of eligible employed earners who claimed family credit would be one fifth higher than for family income supplement. The estimates of total eligible population and expenditure were themselves subject to a number of assumptions, for example, about the movement in the levels of earnings and other income. They must therefore be treated with some caution.

Young People

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security why copies of leaflet FB23, "Young People's Guide to Social Security," were not circulated to independent advice centres in Bradford, Bradford benefit advice shops, youth clubs, church groups, hostels and other organisations which come into contact with young people.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: One million copies of the leaflet "Young People's Guide to Social Security April 1988" have been printed at a total cost of £77,430. In order to ensure that the leaflets are readily available to all young people they have been distributed to all parts of Great Britain, including Bradford. A total of 45,000 of the leaflets have been issued to career offices, 50,000 to

Department of Employment offices, 589,000 to our own local offices and Her Majesty's Stationery Offices. The Department of Social Security "Freephone" service also arranges for copies of the form to be sent to inquirers. In addition, the 17,000 organisations and individuals on the Department's mailing list, many of whom are involved with or represent young people, would automatically have received copies of the form. Any organisation or individual wishing to be added to the Department's leaflets mailing list may do so by making a written request.

Correspondence

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to reply to the letter of 27 October from the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, on the loss of benefit by 16 and 17-year-olds.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I wrote to the hon. Member yesterday.

Pensioners

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how much of the proposed increase of £2·50 a pensioner of over 75 years will retain in net additional income if he is in receipt of housing benefit;

(2) how much of the proposed increase of £3·50 a pensioner couple of over 75 years will retain in net additional income if they are in receipt of housing benefit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is the intention that all pensioners currently on income support will see a gain in net additional income of either £2·50 or £3·50 with any housing benefit entitlement remaining unchanged. Those pensioners with incomes remaining above income support levels after the changes but receiving housing benefit should see a cash increase in their housing benefit but this will be affected by the housing benefit tapers as shown in the following table:

	Couple £	*Single person* £
Increase in rent rebate or allowance	2·28	1·63
Increase in rate rebate	0·70	0·50
Increase in community charge rebate	0·53	0·38

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to increase the level of retirement pensions.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a statutory duty to review the level of state retirement pension every year, and to increase it at least in line with the movement in prices. He informed the House on 27 October that from 10 April 1989 retirement pension will be increased by £2·45 and £3·90 for single pensioners and couples respectively. He also informed the House on 24 November of additional resources of £200 million to be made available to pensioners on low incomes.

Family Credit

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures showing family credit ceilings in 1988 and 1989, for *(a)* a single person with one child under 11 years, *(b)* a single person with two children under 11 years, *(c)* a married couple with one child under 11 years, *(d)* a married couple with two children under 11 years and *(e)* a married couple with two children under 11 years and two over 11 years, as percentages of their income support allowances, including family premium, free school meals and free welfare milk, but excluding housing.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 29 November 1988]*: The information is set out in the table. The results for April 1989 are speculative as assumptions have had to be made about tax rates, tax thresholds and local authority rate levels.

	Family Credit Ceilings (£pw)				*Net income after housing costs on income support (£pw)*			
Family Type	*(Gross Wage)*		*(Net Wage)*					
	(i) 1988	*(ii) 1989*	*(iii) 1988*	*(iv) 1989*	*(v) 1988*	*(vi) 1989*	*(vii) (iii) as per cent. of (v)*	*(viii) (iv) as per cent. of (vi)*
Single person with one child aged 3	130	139	105	113	54·29	57·24	193	197
Single person with two children aged 4 and 6	114	155	114	123	67·49	71·44	169	172
Married couple with one child aged 3	130	139	105	113	68·64	73·24	153	154
Married couple with two children aged 4 and 6	143	155	114	123	81·84	87·44	139	141
Married couple with four children aged 3, 8, 12 and 16	200	218	152	165	122·44	130·69	124	126

Notes:

(a) Family credit ceiling rounded to nearest £.

(b) Net income after housing costs is defined as income support allowance plus free school meals and free welfare milk less 20 per cent. rate contribuition.

(c) Rates are assumed to be the local authority average for council tenants with the appropriate family accommodation.

(d) The approximate possible 1989 rate levels are those for 1988 enhanced by 5·9 per cent.

(e) The average value of free school meals is assumed to be £2·55pw.

(f) The average value of free welfare milk is assumed to be £1·83pw.

(g) Tax thresholds for 1989-90 have been calculated using a simple uplifting of 1988 thresholds.

(h) The basic tax rate is assumed to remain at 25 per cent. in 1989-90.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Department Houses

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present waiting time for the allocation of prison officers' housing for officers serving at London prisons.

Mr. Hurd: Prison service grades are no longer entitled to occupy official quarters as a condition of service and only in exceptional circumstances can such accommodation be provided. Allocation depends on a number of factors including availability and the compelling nature of the applicant's circumstances. Routine statistics are therefore not maintained but information from the five major establishments in London suggests that the waiting time can vary from three months to well over two years.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Ground: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many cases were awaiting resolution by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board at the end of each month since January;

(2) how many cases were resolved by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in each month since January;

(3) how many staff were employed by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board at the end of each month since January.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is given in the following table:

Month	*Cases awaiting resolution at the end of each month*	*Cases resolved during each month*	*Staff in post (part-time staff being each counted as one half)*
January 1988	76,000	3,652	310·5
February 1988	77,000	3,353	309·5
March 1988	78,000	3,180	301·5
April 1988	79,000	2,724	305·5
May 1988	80,000	2,699	304·5
June 1988	80,000	3,393	311·5
July 1988	80,000	2,970	313·5
August 1988	81,000	2,964	312·5
September 1988	80,000	2,813	319·5
October 1988	81,000	3,201	320·5

Mr. Ground: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce the backlog of cases awaiting resolution by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Mr. John Patten: We have increased the board's staff to 320 (including 107 at a new office in Glasgow) and we hope that this will enable the board to reduce the backlog by at least 2,500 cases during 1989-90.

Immigration

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his best estimate of the cost of measuring the average waiting time of sponsors living in the United Kingdom in relation to applications from relatives living in the Indian sub-continent at his Department's Birmingham office over *(a)* a three month period and *(b)* a 12 month period; and if he will outline the basis on which this estimate is made.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to her questions on 29 June, at column *234*, and 14 July, column *329*. The cost of measuring the average waiting time over any period would include the resources involved in examining files at the port, in various parts of Lunar house and in transit to and from entry clearance posts abroad. I am satisfied that it would be disproportionate.

Norris v. Ireland

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, in the light of the recent judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Norris *v.* Ireland, re-affirming that the complete illegality of consensual homosexual acts between males violates article 8 of the European convention on human rights, what steps Her Majesty's Government proposes to take to ensure that the laws outlawing consensual homosexual acts between males in the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are brought into line with the court's ruling.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The law in Guernsey has been amended in order to avoid a breach of the convention in this respect. Further discussions have already been held with the law officers in Jersey and the Isle of Man drawing attention to the judgment in Norris *v.* Ireland.

Homosexuality

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to bring before Parliament proposals to amend the law on sexual offences to implement *(a)* the recommendations of the Policy Advisory Committee (Cmnd. 8216, 1981) and the Criminal Law Revision Committee (Cmnd. 9213, 1984) concerning the age of consent, the definition of privacy and other matters on which the law treats homosexual conduct more harshly than comparable heterosexual conduct and *(b)* the resolutions passed by large inter-party majorities in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 1981 and the European Parliament in 1984 calling on those member states with laws discriminating against homosexuals to end such discrimination.

Mr. John Patten: We have no present plans to do so.

Vietnamese Refugees

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of

Vietnamese refugees admitted for settlement in the United Kingdom *(a)* from Hong Kong and *(b)* from other areas in each of the past five years; and whether he has any proposals to increase these numbers.

Mr. Renton: The number of south-east Asian refugees accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom in the years 1983 to 1987, as published in table 18 of "Control of Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom 1987" (Cm. 415) was:

	Number
1983	1,220
1984	800
1985	530
1986	830
1987	440

In the first six months of 1988 the figure was 300. A breakdown of these figures between those from Hong Kong and those from other areas is not available.

My right hon. Friend has received proposals that we should admit a greater number of south-east Asian refugees from Hong Kong. These proposals are being considered.

Mr. Ronald Joseph McCartney

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether a visit to establish home circumstances was carried out in the case of Ronald Joseph McCartney before deciding not to allow a transfer to Northern Ireland;

(2) why the decision was taken that there were no compelling circumstances to merit the transfer of Mr. Ronald Joseph McCartney from an English prison to Northern Ireland;

(3) what assessment has been made of the suitability of Ronald Joseph McCartney for transfer to a prison in Northern Ireland; and what is his general policy in regard to such transfers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No decison has yet been taken on Mr. McCartney's application to be permanently transferred to Northern Ireland to serve the remainder of his sentence. A visit to establish home circumstances for this purpose is not standard practice, and was not considered necessary in this case. Permanent transfers to Northern Ireland will normally be granted if the applicant has at least six months to serve, if he was domiciled in Northern Ireland before he committed his offence and his family still live there, and the Home Office and Northern Ireland Office are satisfied that he will not, if transferred, disrupt or attempt to disrupt the operation of any prison establishment or otherwise pose an unacceptable threat to security. Even if these criteria are met, however, a transfer may be refused if the inamate has been convicted of a particularly horrific crime; on the other hand, a transfer may be granted where the criteria are not met if there are exceptional and compelling circumstances in the case.

Students (Lobby)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to *(a)* the number of police on duty at the time of and in connection with the lobby on student loans on 24 November and *(b)* the number of police vehicles utilised at the time of and in connection with the lobby;

(2) if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the cost of the police operation on Thursday 24 November at the time of the student lobby of the House on student loans.

Mr. Hurd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 29 November, at columns *174-76*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to why mounted police charged into the groups of students assembled on the south side of Westminster bridge for the National Union of Students lobby of Parliament on 24 November; and who gave the order for this action;

(2) if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to why the police completely closed Westminster bridge during the National Union of Students' lobby of Parliament on Thursday 24 November;

(3) if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police as to who was in charge of the police operation dealing with the National Union of Students' lobby of Parliament on 24 November.

Mr. Hurd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on 28 November, at column 76, and the reply given to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 29 November, at columns *174-76*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to why on Thursday 24 November constituents of various hon. Members in possession of letters from the House of Commons outlining arrangements to meet those Members were prevented by police from getting to Parliament;

(2) if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to why police prevented hon. Members, who had previously arranged to meet constituents involved in the National Union of Students lobby of Parliament on Thursday 24 November from meeting those constituents outside the premises of the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Hurd: I understand from the Commissioner that arrangements were made with the organisers of the demonstration for students who wished to lobby Members of Parliament to follow a route to the House over Lambeth bridge. At various times throughout the afternoon NUS stewards and police officers encouraged lobbyists to use this route. The arrangements were used for orderly lobbying so far as was possible consistent with the duty on the police to ensure that the Sessional Order was not breached. By 6 pm the police had counted 494 students entering the Lobby. Many more were directed down Millbank but chose not to join the Lobby queue.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the policing of the National Union of Students lobby of Parliament on 24 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: Other than those which have been made by hon. Members by way of questions, two letters from hon. Members and two letters from members of the public of which I am aware.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to whether police officers involved in dealing with the National Union of Students lobby of Parliament on Thursday 24 November were aware of which officer was in charge of the operation.

Mr. Hurd: Officers were aware of who was in charge of operations.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to how many *(a)* police vans, *(b)* police officers, *(c)* boats, *(d)* helicopters and *(e)* horses were deployed by the Commissioner of Police in responding to the demonstrations of students in and around Westminster on the afternoon of Thursday 24 November; and what was the cost to public funds of the operation.

Mr. Hurd *[pursuant to his reply, 28 November 1988, c. 75-76]:* The additional cost of policing the demonstration was £27,462.

Prison Officers (House Purchase)

Mr. Michael Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers have purchased their prison quarters since Fresh Start.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In the period since the introduction of Fresh Start until 14 November 1988, 1,101 prison officers have purchased their prison quarters under the Department's discount sales scheme. Information on the few properties sold to prison officers on the open market in this period is not readily available.

Mr. Michael Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many serving officers at Lindholme prison have purchased their prison quarters;

(2) how long it takes for a prison officer serving at Lindholme prison from applying to buy his quarters to signing the final agreement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Twenty prison officers serving at Lindholme prison applied to buy their quarters. None has yet signed a final agreement. The large number of applications for the purchase of quarters under the discount sales scheme has created delays at the conveyancing stage of the sale process which make it impossible to say how long completion of the necessary procedures will take in particular cases.

Correspondence

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate will receive a definitive response in respect of case A424178 about which he first wrote to him in August.

Mr. Renton: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 28 November.

Conservative Trade Unionists Conference

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the additional policing costs arising from the 1988 Conservative Trade Unionists conference in Southport.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the chief constable of Merseyside that the additional costs of policing the 1988 Conservative trades unionists conference in Southport were £32,014.

Trans-frontier Television

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what part his Department's delegation played in the recent Stockholm ministerial conference on trans-frontier television in Europe; what decisions were arrived at; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The United Kingdom delegation, which I led, played a prominent part in this conference, the theme of which was European mass media policy in an international context. We were invited to prepare one of the two main conference papers on the subject of international circulation of European audio-visual works and acted as rapporteur for the discussion of this item. Most of the time of the conference, however, was devoted to discussing the draft convention on transfrontier television, and significant progress was made towards resolving the outstanding issues of difficulty. Our delegation tabled a revised formula on advertising breaks which was generally welcomed and was incorporated into a compromise package which it was agreed could serve as a basis for the final text. The draft convention will now be submitted to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for finalisation, and we hope that it will be opened for signature early next year.

Mr. Errol Codling

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether Mr. Errol "Ranking Dread" Codling was deported or extradited from the United Kingdom; and of what crimes he was accused.

Mr. Renton: The person concerned was removed to Jamaica on 8 November under paragraph 10 of schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971, having entered the United Kingdom illegally.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether telephones will be provided without charge if electronic tagging schemes are introduced for each offender who does not possess a telephone; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many pilot schemes of electronic tagging are being undertaken in consultation with his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Details of the pilot project on the electronic monitoring of people released on bail are being worked out. There are likely to be schemes in two or three areas.

Dogs (Tail Docking)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if, on behalf of Her Majesty's

Government, he intends to sign both articles 10 and 21 of the European convention on the mutilation of animals concerning tail docking of dogs; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has received about signing article 10 but not article 21 of the European convention on the mutilation of animals.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Tail docking is one of the subjects covered in the European convention for the protection of pet animals. It was also raised in a report on animal mutilations by a working party of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. Consultation on that report has now been completed; I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) on 15 July 1988 for a list of the organisations involved. In addition, I have received representations from several hon. Members, some correspondence from members of the public and a number of petitions on this subject. We shall consult interested organisations on all the provisions of the convention before deciding how to proceed.

Breath Tests

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many roadside breath tests took place in 1986 and 1985.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The available information is published annually in Home Office statistical bulletins, "Statistics of breath tests, England and Wales" (table 1 of issue 23/88 gives the latest available figures up to 1987).

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce discretionary or random breath tests.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At present a police officer may require a driver to provide a specimen of breath for a breath test where he has reasonable cause to suspect that the driver has alcohol in his body, and in certain other circumstances. The Association of Chief Police Officers has proposed that the police should in future have unfettered discretion to require breath tests and we are considering this together with proposals on related aspects of road traffic law made by the road traffic law review.

Drink-driving

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions for drunken driving there were in 1986, 1987 and to date in 1988.

Mr. John Patten: The available information relates to findings of guilt for offences of driving, and so on, after consuming alcohol or taking drugs and is published annually in Home Office statistical bulletins, "Offences relating to motor vehicles, England and Wales"; table 9 of issue 32/88 gives the latest available figures up to 1987.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 2 December 1988

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Vietnamese Refugees

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for how many Vietnamese refugees the United Kingdom has provided sanctuary during each of the last five years.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 29 November.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Vietnamese refugees are currently in Hong Kong.

Mr. Waldegrave: On 30 November there were 25,197 Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong, of whom 15,323 have refugee status.

Human Rights

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Soviet Government about the possibility of a human rights conference in Moscow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have made it clear to the Russians at various levels and on several occasions that we view their proposal with scepticism and that they would need to make considerale improvements in their human rights record before we could contemplate a CSCE human rights meeting in Moscow.

Raoul Wallenberg

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise with Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Shevardnadze the case of Mr. Raoul Wallenberg; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Soviet authorities are already well aware of the interest shown by this Government and by the British public in knowing what became of this brave Swede.

Lord Diamond (Photograph)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairsif he will order an investigation as to how the photograph from the MI6 file on the former Labour Minister, Lord Diamond, came to be published on the front page of the *Sunday Express* on 14 February.

Mr. Waldegrave: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to comment on stories of this kind.

Crete (Medals)

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there is any restriction on members of the British armed services who served in Crete during the second world war receiving any commemorative medal issued by the Greek Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The acceptance and wearing of foreign orders, decorations and medals by British subjects is governed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Orders Regulations 1969. A copy of these regulations was placed in the Library of the House in reply to my right hon. Friend's question which was answered on 27 May 1988. These regulations would apply to any commemorative medal issued by the Greek Government if it is intended to be worn.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Pornography

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Attorney-General what references have been made from courts of the United Kingdom to the courts of the European Community, Luxembourg, in respect of intra-community trade in material judged pornographic by courts in the United Kingdom but also subject to articles relating to trade in the treaty of Rome.

The Attorney-General: Questions concerning the interpretation of articles 30 and 36 of the treaty of Rome in the context of proceedings relating to the importation of indecent or obscene articles have been referred by United Kingdom courts to the European Court in two cases: in 1979, by the House of Lords in the case of R. *v.* Henn and Darby, and in 1984, by the High Court in the case of Conegate Limited *v.* Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

I understand that questions relating to article 30 have recently been referred to the European Court in criminal proceedings concerning the licensing of sex shops. The United Kingdom has not formally been notified of such a case by the European Court.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Sylvan High School, Croydon

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what approach he has received from the London borough of Croydon about the conversion of Sylvan high school into a city technology college; and what steps he is taking to consult the parents.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand that the London borough of Croydon is currently consulting interested parties, including parents, about the possible closure of the Sylvan high school and the establishment of a city technology college in its premises. Responsibility for carrying out appropriate consultations rests with Croydon.

Costs (Inner London)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools are to be taken over by each of the inner London borough councils as a result of the abolition of the Inner London education authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: At this stage it is not possible to say precisely how many schools each inner London council will inherit on 1 April 1990. Councils are required to list in their development plans the schools that they propose to maintain. In general, schools will be transferred to the council in whose area they are situated, although it is in principle possible for them to be transferred to a different council if, exceptionally, local circumstances warrant this. Future arrangements for the maintenance of the residential special schools located outside inner London are currently under discussion with the inner London councils and ILEA.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will set out the allowances made to each inner-London borough council in respct of education costs to be incurred in 1988-89, indicating how the total figure and the individual allocations have been arrived at;

(2) what representations he has received from inner-London boroughs about the adequacy of the allowance made to them for education costs in 1988-89; and what has been his response.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government is making available grant of £3 million in 1988-89 in respect of expenditure by the inner London councils on their preparation for the transfer of education responsibilities. Each borough may claim up to £240,000, and the City of London £120,000, reflecting the fact that the major items of preparatory expenditure this year will be common to all councils. A small number of boroughs have made representations about the amount of grant available in 1988-89, but we have informed them that we believe the sums available will be adequate to meet reasonable preparatory costs.

Haberdashers Aske's Hatcham Schools, Deptford

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make available a sum of not less than £4 million in capital funding to the Haberdashers Aske's Hatcham school, in Deptford, in the event of city technology colleges being established on the sites of these schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: An occasional professional assistant working for the Department visited the schools in July at the invitation of the governors to advise on possible modifications to the buildings. As a result of this, the governors have concluded that adaptation of the premises to meet the objectives of the CTC programme might cost £4 million. This is in line with capital grants to CTCs already announced. Any approach by the governors to my right hon. Friend to establish a CTC in place of these schools will be treated strictly on its merits.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if the guidance issued by his Department in circular 11/88 on the use of interviews in admissions procedures for non-selective county and voluntary schools is intended to apply to the Haberdashers Aske's Hatcham schools in Deptford; and if he will make a statement on the implications of changing the terms of articles of government for the schools to take account of this guidance.

Mrs. Rumbold: The guidance in circular 11/88 is meant for all county and voluntary schools. In the Department's view, non-selective schools may not have, as criteria for admission, arrangements which involve selection by reference to ability or aptitude, including any arrangements which, by implication, carry an element of selection, such as headteacher interview to assess the qualities a child might bring to the school.

The making of the articles of government of individual voluntary schools is a matter for the maintaining local education authority, which is required to secure the agreement of the school governing body to the terms of the document. In the event of disagreement, the matter can be referred to my right hon. Friend for determination.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received seeking approval of, or advice on, any draft curriculum for the proposed city technology colleges to be established on the site of the Haberdashers Aske's Hatcham schools in Deptford; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand that a governors' working party which is currently considering various options for the schools' future, including seeking to become a city technology college, has had a paper prepared on a possible CTC curriculum. When this paper was in preparation my officials were asked to give technical advice on how far its contents were in line with the requirements and objectives of the CTC programme.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has assessed whether the details of the membership bodies and funding arrangements set out under the three options in the consultation document entitled, "Securing the Future of the Schools," issued in July by the governors of the Haberdasher Aske's Hatcham schools in Deptford are in line with the guidance of his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: In preparing this document, the Governors sought advice from my officials on the statutory provisions relating to the three options outlined for the schools' future. They also sought advice on whether the plans outlined under the CTC option would meet the requirements and objectives of the CTC programme.

Implementation of possible plans for grant maintained status set out under option 2 of the document would be subject to the publication by the governors of proposals under section 62 of the Education Reform Act 1988, and their approval by my right hon. Friend. Implementation of the CTC plans would require the governors to give notice of their intention to discontinue the schools under the provision of section 14 of the Education Act 1944. They are likely to need my right hon. Friend's leave to give such notice. Any decisions which fall to him will be taken strictly on their merits and in the light of the individual circumstances, including the consultations undertaken by the governors.

Student Loans

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the meetings which have taken place and the meetings scheduled to take place between his Department and the banking and financial services sector in respect of proposals for student loans; and if he will give an interim report of the progress made in these talks.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: No. Like all discussions of a commercial nature, these discussions are confidential.

Students (Work)

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate the numbers of young people leaving universities and polytechnics and being available for work in each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson *[pursuant to his reply, 1 December 1988, c. 354-5]:* I regret that, due to a typing error, my answer gave a figure for 1992 of 150,000. This should be 105,000. The corrected answer is therefore as follows:

Future recruitment and, certainly, students' intentions after qualifying, are obviously difficult to predict. A key factor over the next five years is the continuing fall in the traditional student entry age group. However, due to increasing participation rates and greater recruitment of part-time and mature students, numbers generally are projected to hold up against that trend. Indeed, the number of home students at higher education institutions in Great Britain who were under 21 on entry and, on qualifying, would enter the labour market is estimated to grow from nearly 100,000 in 1987 to about 105,000 in 1992.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Companies Registration Office

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to change the role of the Companies Registration Office following its launch as an executive agency.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 30 November 1988]:* The role of Companies House as an executive agency is set out in the policy and resources framework document, a copy of which is in the Library.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will ban the import of products produced with chlorofluorocarbons from non-signature countries to the Montreal protocol.

Mr. Atkins: The Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer which the United Kingdom signed on 16 September 1987 and expects to ratify this month, has provision for such controls to be applied by parties within four years of its entry into force to goods containing chlorofluorocarbons and halons. The protocol also has provision for the feasibility of such controls to be considered by parties, in respect of goods made with but not containing these substances, within five years of its entry into force.

The Government will, with the European Community and other parties, consider the implications and acceptability of such controls at the appropriate time.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will impose a mandatory labelling scheme on producers of aerosol cans to distinguish which products contain substances which damage the ozone layer.

Mr. Atkins: The Government continue to believe that this is a matter best left to the operation of the market, rather than rigid legislative control. We welcome the decision earlier this year by the British Aerosol Manufacturers Association to label products not containing CFCs. We also await with interest the outcome of discussions, in the context of the resolution agreed by the Council of Ministers on 16 June, between the European Commission and the European aerosol and other industries on the conclusion of a voluntary agreement for a common Community label for chlorofluorocarbon-free products.

Civil Defence

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether the assessment referred to in his written answer of 12 February 1986, *Official Report*. column *483*, to the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden), of the essential requirements which industry could be called on to supply for civil defence purposes, and industry's capability to meet them has been completed; and if he proposes to place a copy of the completed assessment in the Library.

Mr. Forth: Work on this exercise continues. The results will remain confidential.

TRANSPORT

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to recommend higher fastening torques for wheels on heavy goods vehicles;

(2) what is the estimate of the number of road accidents over the past five years attributable to wheel loss on heavy goods vehicles because of inadequate fastening;

(3) what plans he has to require that coned nuts used in the fitting of lorry wheels be replaced by flat nuts.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Since the beginning of 1983, there have been 130 wheel detachments reported to the vehicle inspectorate. They resulted in 10 fatalities and 24 serious injuries.

Wheel security on commercial vehicles has been the subject of recent research by the Motor Industry Research Association, sponsored by the Institute of Road Transport Engineers and the Department of Trade and Industry.

The Department and the British Standards Institution expect to receive the full research reports shortly. These will be carefully considered to see if any changes are needed in the current British Standard and regulations.

Concessionary Fares

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to which districts in England do not have any system of concessionary bus fares for any category of pensioners and which districts confine their concessionary fare system to those pensioners on income support.

Mr. Portillo: According to information supplied on a voluntary basis to the Department in 1986-87, 27 of the 332 English districts outside London have no system of concessionary bus fares for those of state pensionable age and 22 of those districts which do have such schemes specify an income restriction for eligibility.

Speed Limits

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of lorries using Britain's motorways he estimates are in breach of speed limits.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A survey of vehicle speeds on motorways, under conditions where traffic was able to flow freely, found that 22 per cent. of heavy goods vehicles travelling on motorways were exceeding their speed limit of 60 miles per hour in 1987.

During a similar survey in 1983, the corresponding figure was 39 per cent.

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to require lorries to instal speed limiters to prevent them breaking speed limits.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Not at present.

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the number of accidents involving fatalities or serious injury which occurred through lorries breaking speed limits on Britain's motorways for each year between 1983 and 1987.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Data are not collected on the causes of accidents.

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is considering steps to facilitate the introduction of roadside and car-mounted cameras to monitor road speeds.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

The road traffic law review which was published in April recommended the use of cameras to detect speeding and traffic light offences. The Government have endorsed in principle the review's conclusion that the use of cameras for these purposes is acceptable and that satisfactory procedures can be developed for using the evidence from such devices. We shall be announcing our conclusions on the review as a whole early in the new year.

Leeds-Bradford Airport

Mr. Merlyn Rees: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will meet the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to discuss the monitoring, the timing and the regulation of scheduled flights to and from Leeds-Bradford airport.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to discuss these matters with the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he has any plans, in the interest of safety, to require a review of the designs for Channel tunnel rail shuttle vehicles; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the railway inspectorate and the marine directorate have been asked to investigate the safety procedures for the operation of the Channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The approval of the Secretary of State is required for any train operating through the tunnel, including shuttle trains, and he will of course be able to look to the railway inspectorate and the marine directorate if necessary for advice on relevant proposals from Eurotunnel.

More generally, Eurotunnel is required under the Channel fixed link concession agreement to submit to the United Kingdom-French intergovernmental commission the general characteristics of the design of the tunnel and the associated transport system including rolling stock, with particular emphasis on safety aspects, and also proposed safety arrangements including operating rules and emergency procedures. Eurotunnel has already submitted a number of design proposals, though so far for the rail shuttle vehicles only conceptual proposals, and it has yet to submit its operating rules and emergency procedures. The intergovernmental commission has the assistance of the United Kingdom-French safety authority, and the commission and the authority can look for assistance to bodies such as the railway inspectorate and the marine directorate. (The deputy chief inspecting officer of railways is in fact a member of the authority).

Pavements (Parking)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to reintroduce his Department's campaign against parking on pavements.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The campaign is continuing. We have issued more than 37,000 leaflets and posters this year with the message "Pavements are for People". The pavement parking problem has also been publicised frequently on television.

London Underground

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the report of the manning by the London fire brigade, carried out in the current year, into the whole of London Underground.

Mr. Portillo: I am not aware of such a report and would ask the hon. Member for details of the report to which he refers.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many uniformed officers of the British Transport police are usually deployed underground on the London Underground.

Mr. Portillo: On an average day 102 uniformed officers are deployed, on a three shift basis, on the Underground network.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the report of the London fire brigade's inspection of six London Underground stations in March.

Mr. Portillo: Publication is a matter for London Underground. I understand that LUL will be publishing reports on such inspections in future, through the London Regional Passenger Committee, in line with the recommendation in Mr. Fennell's report on the King's Cross fire.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussion he has had with London Regional Transport on improving Underground platform safety and increasing the number of platform staff at Underground stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The statutory responsibility for Underground safety rests with London Regional Transport. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked LRT to make regular reports to him on its implementation of the recommendations of the Fennell report which include a number relevant to platform safety.

Road Accidents (Lorries)

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents leading to fatalities or serious injury involved lorries on Britain's motorways, for each year between 1983 and 1987.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The table shows the number of fatal and serious accidents on motorways in Great Britain between 1983 and 1987 in which heavy goods vehicles were involved.

Accidents on motorways involving heavy goods vehicles
Great Britain: 1983 to 1987

Severity	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Fatal	49	70	68	56	78
Serious	260	246	237	269	318

Mr. Mullins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give figures for the number of fatal accidents involving heavy goods vehicles for each year from 1979 to 1987.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The table shows the number of fatal accidents in Great Britain between 1979 and 1987 in which heavy goods vehicles were involved:

Fatal accidents involving heavy goods vehicles: Great Britain 1979-1987

	Number
1979	940
1980	782
1981	761
1982	786
1983	722
1984	777
1985	728
1986	794
1987	776

HOME DEPARTMENT

Horse and Greyhound Racing

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to widen the scope of his discussions on the 28th levy scheme and the feasibility study into the privatisation of the Horserace Totalisator Board to encompass an inquiry into the finances of both horse and greyhound racing.

Mr. Hurd: No. I do not believe that it would be practicable or necessary to hold such an inquiry in deciding what the 28th horserace betting levy scheme should be. The feasibility study on privatising the Horserace Totalisator Board takes account of the implications of privatisation for the regulation of gambling and the health of horseracing. I understand that Lloyds Merchant Bank, which is conducting the study, has already had the benefit of views on the circumstances of horse and greyhound racing from the British Greyhound Racing Board. I am considering separately a request from that board for an inquiry into the off-course betting industry and its relationship to the finances of both forms of racing.

Passport Office, Newport

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received concerning the situation at the passport office in Newport, Gwent;

(2) if he has any plans to increase staffing levels at the passport office in Newport, Gwent;

(3) what proposals he has to reduce the backlog and delays at the passport office in Newport.

Mr. Renton: Passport applications to the Newport passport office are being processed within six working days. There is no backlog of work. No representations have been received specifically about the passport office in Newport. However, a number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Newport, East, have written recently about staffing levels in the passport department, following an approach to them by the Civil and Public Services Association and the National Union of Civil and Public Servants. Replies will be sent shortly.

Football Hooligans

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will take action to prevent convicted football hooligans from travelling to football matches abroad.

Mr. Hurd: Yes. I intend to bring forward proposals for the courts to be given powers to prevent convicted football hooligans from attending matches abroad, by requiring them to report to an agency in this country at times when certain matches are due to take place. The courts would have power to impose a restriction order on a person convicted of a football-related offence here in any case in which the order would help to reduce the risk of disorder and violence at matches abroad. I am also considering how a restriction order might similarly be imposed following conviction for a football-related offence abroad. Provisions will be included in the Football Spectators Bill, to be introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Keith Mulcahy

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Halifax will receive a reply to her letter written on 26 October concerning her constituent, Keith Mulcahy, and his treatment by the governor of Armley prison.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I replied to the hon. Member on 1 December.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil servants have volunteered to take part in practical experiments with electronic tagging schemes; what have been the results; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 1 December 1988]:* Two officials voluntarily wore electronic monitoring devices. The preliminary tests yielded useful experience as part of our evaluation of these devices, but were not intended to be a systematic assessment of the equipment. Full trials in two or three areas will begin shortly.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission; and whether the commission's recommendation for strengthening the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts were discussed.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 1 December 1988]*: My right hon. Friend met the then chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission on 26 April to discuss its proposals for strengthening the Acts. At the meeting it was agreed that the first step was for the Home Office to consult the other Departments concerned with the proposals. I have had a number of meetings with the chairman, most recently on 1 November.

Safer City Initiatives

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he uses in establishing safer city initiatives; and whether he intends to establish a safer city initiative in Liverpool.

Mr. Hurd *[holding answer 1 December 1988]*: The criteria used to select safer cities initiatives are that the area must (i) be an unban programme area, (ii) have a high crime rate, (iii) be targeted for Government action, and (iv) be willing to participate in the safer cities programme. Nine areas have already agreed to join the programme and a futher seven will be selected shortly. If Liverpool applies, it will be one of the areas considered when coming to a decision.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Currency Reserves

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the gold and foreign currency reserves at the latest available date compared with 1958, 1968, 1978 and each year since 1982, and the extent to which the change was due to a change in the value of the assets held at the beginning of each period; to what extent the increase in the reserves was sterilised by the issue of debt instruments; and if he will give particulars of the holdings of such instruments at the latest available date.

Mr. Lilley: In October this year the official reserves stood at more than $50 billion. The levels of official reserves for earlier years are shown on page 147 of *Economic Trends*, annual supplement 1988 edition, and in table 28 of the monthly *Economic Trends*, published by the Central Statistical Office. Details of annual valuation changes since 1979 in the official reserves can be found in pages 98-99 of *Financial Statistics*, explanatory handbook: 1988 edition, also published by the Central Statistical Office.

The Government's policy of fully funding the PSBR, the underlying changes in the reserves and maturing debt, although not necessarily in the same financial year in which they occur, was last enunciated in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Mansion House speech on 20 October. It is not possible to distinguish the assets used to fund the underlying changes in the reserves from those used for other funding.

Interest Rates

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received regarding the effect of high interest rates on levels of consumer credit.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has received a number of such representations.

Civil Servants (Privileges)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the privileges, other than privileged leave, given to established civil servants.

Mr. Brooke: The terms and conditions applying to established non-industrial civil servants are set out in the Civil Service pay and conditions of service code, a copy of which is in the Library.

Staff Dispersal

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about proposals to relocate offices for Government Departments away from London.

Mr. Brooke: I said in the Adjournment debate on 9 May 1988, at column 130, that I would give the House, at the earliest convenient opportunity, an account of the progress made and planned by Departments under the successor policy to the Government's dispersal programme which I announced on 31 March. Most major Departments already have serious and substantial reviews of locations in hand. I intend to give the House a fuller report in the early months of 1989.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the effects of present levels of interest rates and inflation on manufacturing industries in the north-west.

Mr. Lilley: A number. Manufacturing industry—wherever it is located—has most to fear from any resurgence of inflation. The Government's monetary policy will ensure continued downward pressure on inflation.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will adjust the weighting of student private sector rent allowance claims from April 1990 onwards to ensure that the level of administrative subsidy in respect of such cases continues to reflect their complexity and difficulty.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The arrangements for allocating housing benefit administration costs subsidy to local authorities for 1990-91 will be the subject of discussions between the Department and the local authority associations during 1989. No final decisions have yet been taken but it has been agreed with the associations that the weighting given to student cases should be reviewed as part of those discussions.

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether local education authorities will be reimbursed for the full cost of developing and implementing the liaison arrangements with the rent officer when students put in a claim for housing benefit comprising a claim for rent allowances only.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government have made £1 million available to local authorities for their costs in preparing for the new rent officer arrangements from April 1989 and conducting pilot schemes. In addition, the overall level of provision for local authorities' housing benefit administration costs in 1989-90 has been increased by 1 per cent. to take account of the new arrangements. It is for each local authority to decide how best to allocate the resources available to it for the rent officer arrangements and no separate allocations has been made for claims from students.

Income Support

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many 16 and 17-year-olds in the Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway area currently receive *(a)* income support and *(b)* bridging allowance.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of 16 and 17-year-olds in Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway who were receiving bridging allowance as at 10 November 1988 (the latest date for which figures are available) was 287.

I regret that the information regarding 16 and 17-year-olds currently in receipt of income support could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Child Benefit (Children in Care)

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what conditions child benefit payments are made for children in care; whether he has any plans to alter these arrangements; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Child benefit usually stops when a child has been in care for eight weeks but it can continue for longer if the child visits the claimant for stays of at least a week at a time; it can also continue if there is an ongoing arrangement that the child lives with the claimant for at least a day every week.

There are no plans to alter these arrangements, apart from some technical amendments to child benefit rules which will be necessary to reflect proposed changes in child care law.

Pensions

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much the pensioner's earnings limit has changed since November 1978 in *(a)* cash terms, *(b)* real terms and *(c)* as a percentage of average earnings; and whether he will increase it in April 1989.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since November 1978 the pensioner's earnings limit has increased in cash terms by £30 to £75. In real terms there has been a decrease of £20. In November 1978 the pensioner's earnings limit was 51·5 per cent. of average male manual workers' earnings. In September 1988 the percentage was 36·4.

The Secretary of State has a statutory duty to review the earnings limit every year. We shall not be increasing it in April 1989.

Widows' Benefit

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by what percentage the addition to widows' benefit for a dependent child, including child benefit, is to be increased in April 1989; and what was the percentage increase in prices over the 12 months to September 1988.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In common with the other non-income-related benefits the child dependency increase payable with widows' benefit is to be uprated by the best of both worlds approach which my right hon. Friend explained to the House on 27 October. The child dependency increase will rise by slightly more than 6·5 per cent. from April 1989. The addition to widows' benefit for a dependent child, including child benefit, will be increased by 3·5 per cent. The percentage increase in the published RPI over the 12 months to September 1988 was 5·9 per cent.

DEFENCE

Tank Purchase

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce which new tank the British Army will be purchasing.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) on 29 November (column *566*).

Facilities (Woolwich)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for his Department's facilities at Woolwich.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) on 31 October 1988 at column *531*. I also refer him to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement on 1 December 1988 at column *352*.

Armaments Depot (Milford Haven)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the result of the consultation process concerning Milford Haven Royal Navy armaments depot.

Mr. Freeman: After careful consideration of all the arguments put forward by the trades unions, local authorities and other interested parties for the retention of the depot, I have decided that for overwhelming economic and operational reasons RNAD Milford Haven will close. The depot will be converted to a non-explosive storage facility by March 1990 and closed finally by March 1991, before which the site will be cleared of ordnance.

As I informed my hon. Friend during the debate on 28 July 1988, consideration of the removal and demolition of buildings is an integral part of the disposal process. We shall consider what needs to be done when we examine other uses for the site. It is our intention that a new use be found for the site immediately upon military vacation.

The Ministry of Defence will cooperate with the Welsh Office and local authorities in trying to find alternative uses for the site. Every effort will also be made to find alternative employment for the staff employed at the depot whose loyalty and dedication in the past has been highly valued.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the development of the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) on 29 November at column *568*.

Trident

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the latest estimate for the cost of Trident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The current estimate for Trident is £9,043 million at 1987-88 prices and on exchange rate of £1 = $1·62. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House on 29 November, a revised estimate will be announced early next year.

Gurkha Cantonment

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if a date has been set for the conversion of the Gurkha recruiting, resettlement and welfare cantonment at Dharan to civilian use; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As part of my Department's drive to rationalise support and infrastructure facilities, the site at Dharan is to be handed over to the Nepalese Government for civilian use with effect from 1 January 1990. The use to which the site will be put after that date is a matter for the Nepalese Government, but it is our understanding that the provision of health facilities, centred around the existing British military hospital, is likely to be the major priority. The British Government have expressed willingness to offer aid to assist in the transition to Nepalese management. It should be stressed that the decision to convert the Dharan site to civilian use is not related to, or dependent upon, decisions on the future of the Gurkhas as a whole.

WALES

North-south Road Link

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what proposals he has to develop the A470 as the main road link between north and south Wales;

(2) what proposals he has to provide an improved road link between north and south Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Government's plans for development of the A470 and other road links between north and south Wales are set out in "Roads in Wales 1985".

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to take to ensure that the opportunities presented by the Channel tunnel scheme come to Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: We have already taken a number of actions to ensure that the opportunities presented by the Channel tunnel come to Wales. These include the series of seminars we have arranged to increase awareness of the single European market and the appointment of a Channel fixed link liaison officer to advise companies in Wales of opportunities to tender for contracts as they arise. In addition the Department is represented on the consultative forum which British Rail has set up as part of the process of planning its Channel tunnel services. We will continue to take all necessary steps to ensure that businesses in Wales are aware of the great opportunities which are now arising.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of planning appeal decisions in Wales which were *(a)* allowed, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* withdrawn and *(d)* undetermined for each of the last five years; and if he will express the numbers allowed and dismissed as a percentage of those determined.

Mr. Peter Walker: Planning decisions by local authorities for each of the last five financial years are as follows (the information is not available for applications withdrawn and undetermined):

Year	*Allowed*	*Per cent.*	*Dismissed*	*Per cent.*
1983-84	23,362	89·4	2,778	10·6
1984-85	21,475	87·7	3,015	12·3
1985-86	21,656	87·8	3,010	12·2
1986-87	22,610	88·5	2,949	11·5
1987-88	24,106	87·2	3,539	12·8

Planning appeal decisions are as follows:

Year	*Allowed*	*Per cent.*	*Dismissed*	*Per cent.*	*Withdrawn*	*Undetermined at year end*
1983	241	35·9	431	64·1	167	430
1984	229	36·3	402	63·7	161	444
1985	261	42·5	353	57·5	172	570

Year	*Allowed*	*Per cent.*	*Dismissed*	*Per cent.*	*Withdrawn*	*Undetermined at year end*
1985-86[1]	312	44·6	388	55·4	175	541
1986-87[1]	326	41·2	465	58·8	189	591
1987-88[1]	281	32·4	587	67·6	179	610

[1] The basis for the recorded statistics was changed from the calendar year to the financial year from 1 April 1985.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of planning appeal decisions which were *(a)* allowed, *(b)* dismissed, *(c)* withdrawn and *(d)* undetermined in each of the Welsh national parks in each of the last five years; and if he will express the numbers allowed and dismissed as a percentage of those determined.

Mr. Peter Walker: This information is not available.

SCOTLAND

Nurses (Grading)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give for each health board the number of nurses in each grade, and when they were first informed of that grade, prior to any review or appeal.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Health board	*Staff in post (whole-time equivalents)*	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*
Argyll and Clyde	4,354	1,542	73	399	576	649	299	629	96	91
Ayrshire and Arran	3,078	881	70	335	433	530	285	434	56	54
Borders	1,019	329	12	115	82	199	102	135	28	17
Dumfries and Galloway	1,652	466	34	156	288	317	97	211	50	33
Fife	3,132	894	38	410	571	608	107	389	97	18
Forth Valley	3,135	1,133	124	158	553	568	119	391	67	22
Grampian	5,197	1,517	80	681	1,058	741	269	652	119	80
Greater Glasgow	12,444	3,731	262	1,129	2,238	2,141	1,234	1,157	404	148
Highland	2,097	518	15	104	288	544	218	317	46	47
Lanarkshire	4,713	1,195	53	682	634	1,027	225	698	151	48
Lothian	8,152	2,239	214	446	1,502	1,892	311	1,170	220	158
Orkney	171	35	2	57	11	19	3	40	2	2
Shetland	201	43	2	42	13	32	14	44	10	1
Tayside	5,075	1,535	67	686	585	1,099	338	542	165	58
Western Isles	259	55	—	28	21	58	30	61	3	3
Totals	54,679	16,113	1,046	5,428	8,853	10,424	3,651	6,870	1,514	780

All figures rounded to nearest whole number.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if there will be additional money to fund successful nurse regrading appeals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Additional funding has been made available to meet in full the cost of the nurses' pay award this year, including regrading. Health boards will be expected to meet their commitments from within the total resources made available to them.

Ambulance Service (Glasgow)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions the Scottish ambulance service has had with greater Glasgow health board concerning accident and emergency services.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are regular meetings between the Scottish ambulance service and the Greater Glasgow health board at which all aspects of the ambulance service are discussed.

W. Howden

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received recent representations from solicitors acting on behalf of W. Howden, a prisoner held in Edinburgh's Saughton prison; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No representations have been received from solicitors representing Mr. Howden since January 1988. A review of Mr. Howden's suitability for release on life licence is in train.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the discharges and *(b)* the deaths, by length of stay, including percentage change in numbers and percentage distribution, of patients suffering from schizophrenic psychoses, in Scotland in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 November]*: Provisional information for 1987 on percentage distribution of discharges and deaths of patients suffering from schizophrenic psychoses contained in the following table. Percentage change in numbers cannot be provided as the period over which to assess change is not specified.

Discharges and deaths of patients with schizophrenic psychoses from all mental hospitals in 1987 showing distributions of total length of stay

	Less than 1 week	Weeks 1-2	Weeks 3-4	Weeks 5-6	Weeks 7-8	Weeks 9-10	Weeks 11-12	Months 3-6	Months 7-9	Months 10-12	Over 1 year	Total
Discharges	454	797	508	320	220	131	89	283	106	45	373	3,326
Percentage	13·7	24·0	15·3	9·6	6·6	3·9	2·7	8·5	3·2	1·4	11·2	100
Deaths	3	7	2	2	3	1	—	4	2	1	142	167
Percentage	1·8	4·2	1·2	1·2	1·8	0·6	—	2·4	1·2	0·6	85·0	100

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the admissions by diagnosis and order of admissions, including percentage change in numbers and rates per 100,000 population, of patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses in Scotland in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 November]*: The available information, which is provisional, is given in the table:

Admissions to psychiatric hospitals with the diagnosis of schizophrenic psychoses, 1987

Order of admission	Number 1987	Rate[1]
First	365	7·1
Other	2,873	56·2
Total	3,238	63·3

[1] Per 100,000 population (1987 mid-year estimate).

Percentage change in numbers cannot be provided as the period over which to assess change is not specified.

ENVIRONMENT

Ozone Layer

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that the electronics industry is aware of the dangers to the atmosphere of CFC 113 in cleaning fluids and to encourage greater use of recycling and recovery and of other cleaning methods.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Officials of the Department of the Environment and of the Department of Trade and Industry hold regular meetings with representatives of the users of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), including the electronics industry, on the steps that they are taking to reduce use of CFCs to the maximum possible extent. This includes making more efficient use of CFCs as well as switching to alternative substances and processes where feasible. The electronics industry is introducing recycling plant and stringent operating practices to minimise CFC emissions and is playing a full part in the revision and strengthening of the EC code of practice on CFC 113 and encouraging its adoption as an EC standard. Officials from both Departments have participated in seminars organised by the electronics industry on alternative cleaning methods and have disseminated to the industry information on the steps being taken internationally on this front.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on research into the destruction of chlorofluorocarbons.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The first meeting of the parties to the Montreal protocol, planned for April 1989, will be invited to establish a standing technical committee to review and recommend for approval by the parties methods for destroying chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). Officials of the Department of the Environment and of the Department of Trade and Industry are discussing the work being done in this area with representatives from British industry.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to limit the escape of chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere as a result of their use in the food packaging industry.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Under the Montreal protocol measures to control consumption of specified chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are based on reducing overall supply rather than individual uses. Market forces will determine how available supplies are used. We are, nevertheless, keen that user industries should take steps on a voluntary basis to reduce use of CFCs to the maximum possible extent. We therefore welcome the intention of all United Kingdom manufacturers of extruded polystyrene food containers to phase out use of the CFCs controlled by the protocol.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he will take to eradicate chlorofluorocarbons from domestic use.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Under the Montreal protocol international action to reduce emissions of chlorofluorocarbons is based on measures to control overall production and consumption of CFCs. The protocol will be implemented within the European Community by way of a regulation laying down common rules to limit overall production and consumption of these chemicals. Within that regulatory framework we are strongly encouraging user industries to reduce use of CFCs on a voluntary basis to the maximum possible extent. The British aerosol industry expects to phase out non-essential use of CFCs in aerosols by the end of 1989. Other sectors are also taking steps to reduce their dependency on CFCs. Consumers have an important role to play in assisting this process.

Local Authority Employees

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide a breakdown of the number of local authority employees by *(a)* sex and *(b)* ethnic origin.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In June 1988 local authorities in England employed 841,000 males and 1,479,000 females in general services (ie excluding law and order services). The information on ethnic origin of local authority staff is not collected centrally.

Carbon Monoxide (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will initiate a consistent series of carbon monoxide measurements for Nottingham.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. In my reply to the hon. Member of 28 November [*Official Report*, Tuesday 29 November, column *131*] I explained that the Department is making measurements of carbon monoxide in London where the impact of traffic, the dominant source, is likely to be among the highest in the country. I am not aware of any factors which suggest that conditions in Nottingham warrant additional monitoring.

Pollution

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will extend the new requirement for industry to use the best available technology to reduce the polluting effect of industrial discharges to existing dischargers; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Works scheduled under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 must be operated using the "best practicable means" to prevent atmospheric emissions and to abate any emissions that cannot be prevented. This incorporates the use of best available technology not entailing excessive cost for newly scheduled works. Existing scheduled works are reviewed periodically and, if appropriate, the controls over emissions upgraded.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which water authorities have reached the permitted levels of ammoniacal nitrogen in their river systems for each year since 1983.

Mr. Moynihan: Water authorities set their own water quality objectives which may include standards for ammonia. Compliance with such standards is a matter for the authorities. However, some 16,000 kms of river length in England and Wales have been designated by authorities for the purposes of the EC directive on the "Quality of freshwater needing protection or improvement in order to support fish life" (75/659/EEC) which does contain ammonia standards. The only compliance data held centrally relate to 1984 and show that overall some 97 per cent. of the length of designated rivers met the ammonia standards in the directive. Results for later years are held by the authorities concerned.

Wildlife and Countryside Act

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what organisations he intends to consult prior to introducing legislation to amend section 53 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have sought the views of the principal organisations representing the interests of farmers and landowners, the users of public rights of way, the local authority associations and the rights of way review committee on the difficulties and deficiencies that the proposed legislation should seek to resolve.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. by the year 2000.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government is concerned to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2) and other "greenhouse" gases. The realistic pricing of energy to encourage its efficient use and the continued development of sources of power other than fossil fuels will help to reduce the generation of CO_2. The exhaust emission standards for small cars agreed by the European Community last month preserve the incentive to develop fuel-efficient "lean-burn" engines.

We are not yet in a position, given our present understanding of the science, to devise precise reduction targets which are feasible or related to specific environmental objectives. Our first priority therefore is to improve our understanding of the problems of climatic change and their impact on the environment. We are initiating our own research amd playing a full part in international efforts to this end.

Lowland Heaths

Mr. Nicholas Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will support the implementation of the flora, fauna and habitat directive in order to protect threatened lowland heaths in Great Britain.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The draft directive proposed by the European Commission is unacceptable to all member states of the community. In Great Britain the statutory procedures imposed following designation as a site of special scientific interest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) ensure that the conservation interest of the important areas of this type of habitat is protected from potentially damaging operations and is taken fully into account in all land use decisions.

County Hall, London

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from London borough councils about the distribution of the proceeds of the sale of county hall; and what reply he has given.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Representations about the distribution of proceeds from the sale of county hall have recently been received from the London boroughs of Greenwich, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston, Lewisham, Redbridge, Westminster and Tower Hamlets. All London boroughs will be consulted about distribution in 1989-90 of capital receipts by the London Residuary Body, including any from county hall.

Rating Reform

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the amounts to be allowed to each local authority in *(a)* inner London and *(b)* outer London to meet the setting up costs of the community charge, indicating in each case the division between specific and block grant, and showing where available the local authority's own estimates of the costs involved.

Mr. Gummer: Column 1 of the table shows the London authorities' share of the £25 million capital allocation made available for 1988-89. My right hon. Friend announced on 21 October that a further allocation of £135 million would be made for 1989-90 and individual allocations from this total will shortly be made.

My right hon. Friend also announced on 21 October that half the provision of £110 million included in the 1989-90 RSG settlement for the current costs of preparing for the community charge will be met through a specific grant. Column 2 of the table sets out the estimated share of that £55 million for the London authorities. The remaining £55 million will be supported by rate support grant.

We do not have comprehensive figures for local authorities' own estimates of these costs. The figure of £110 million is in line with the estimate made by Price Waterhouse and is higher than the figure for current costs put forward by the local authority associations in July.

	1988-89 Capital Allocation £ Column 1	*1989-90 Specific Grant £ Column 2*
GREATER LONDON		
Inner London		
City of London	2,879	10,000
Camden	103,253	368,000
Greenwich	113,799	279,000
Hackney	96,512	288,000
Hammersmith and Fulham	83,739	314,000
Islington	91,389	282,000
Kensington and Chelsea	78,508	336,000
Lambeth	131,574	414,000
Lewisham	123,841	330,000
Southwark	115,568	311,000
Tower Hamlets	79,220	203,000
Wandsworth	140,256	441,000
Westminster	100,987	418,000
Outer London		
Barking and Dagenham	78,620	150,000
Barnet	163,177	421,000
Bexley	117,410	248,000
Brent	135,687	375,000
Bromley	161,463	373,000
Croydon	169,030	416,000
Ealing	157,438	425,000
Enfield	141,895	314,000
Haringey	104,637	304,000
Harrow	107,651	245,000
Havering	127,660	260,000
Hillingdon	123,655	282,000
Hounslow	102,520	255,000
Kingston-upon-Thames	73,252	180,000
Merton	89,053	218,000
Newham	105,249	272,000
Redbridge	123,151	279,000
Richmond-upon-Thames	90,006	251,000
Sutton	91,207	207,000
Waltham Forest	113,995	296,000

Nature Conservancy Council and Countryside Commission

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether new funding is to be made available to the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission to relieve pressure on their support for the voluntary sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The public expenditure allocations for 1989-90 announced for the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission should enable them to make grants to the voluntary and private sectors £1·85 million and £5 million respectively. The Nature Conservancy Council has also allocated additional resources of £440,000 for grants in the current year, as a result of savings elsewhere in the council's budget.

Marine Conservation and Bat Ecology

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures are to be taken to safeguard work carried out on practical projects and by volunteers in marine conservation and bat ecology, formerly supported by the Natural Environmental Research Council funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I understand that the Natural Environment Research Council has made some staff reductions in areas which it judges to have lower priority. The reductions include one post concerned with bat ecology, in a project which has used volunteer labour. The council has not funded marine conservation work using volunteers in recent years. We will continue to rely on our statutory advisers, the Nature Conservancy Council, for advice on conservation matters, supplemented as necessary by research commissioned by the Department.

Groundwater

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Halcrow report providing an assessment of groundwater quality in England and Wales will be published.

Mr. Howard: I am pleased to inform the House that the Halcrow report is published today. Copies of the report are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Water

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of the State for the Environment what progress is being made by the water authorities in preparation for the establishment of the National Rivers Authority.

Mr. Howard: I have today placed in the Library of the House summary schemes of organisation prepared by each water authority in conjunction with the National Rivers Authority Advisory Committee under my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Crickhowell.

These show the proposed organisation of the National Rivers Authority unit in each water authority region, and together with a summary document indicate that about 6,500 staff are likely to transfer to the National Rivers Authority, of whom about 50 per cent. will work on flood defence/land drainage work, and about a third on environmental and water resource functions.

Provisional estimates suggest that existing water authority assets to a value of £460 million are expected to transfer to the National Rivers Authority. Inevitably, these figures are provisional at this stage, and the final figures will depend on decisions on various matters still under consideration.

I should like to pay tribute to the water authorities, and to the National Rivers Authority Advisory Committee, for the work done so far on the restructuring of the industry.

These documents show that the water authorities are well on target for the operation of separate National Rivers Authority units from 1 April 1989. They represent a major step forward towards the establishment of a National Rivers Authority and the preparation for the privatisation of the utility functions.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of the State for the Environment (1) if he will state, in respect of each water authority, the area of land which has been designated as *(a)* sites of special scientific interest, *(b)* national parks and *(c)* areas of outstanding natural

(2) if he will state, in respect of each statutory water company, the area of land which has been designated as *(a)* sites of special scientific interest, *(b)* national parks and *(c)* areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 1 December 1988]:* This information is not available.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Export Refund System

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the total of outstanding payments to United Kingdom food manufacturers from the IBAP;

(2) if he will estimate the payments outstanding to small firms arising from the IBAP processing delays; and what arrangements are being made for loans to cover emergency requirements;

(3) what representations he has had from the makers of cakes and biscuits regarding the adequacy of the export refund system;

(4) what is his estimate of the total cost of the current backlog of the export refund payments in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The net value of outstanding export refund payments is currently estimated at around £35 million, about 70 per cent. below the peak in the summer. I regret that separate figures are not available for any specific category or size of trader. There have been a number of representations to both Ministers and officials from cake and biscuit manufacturers about the impact of delayed payments. The Intervention Board is doing all in its power to reduce outstanding payments and estimate that by the end of the year some 95 per cent. of all claims by value will be paid within two months of becoming payable. As announced on 28 July, the board has been authorised to pay compensation on export refunds paid after more than two months from the time they become payable. This is a fair means of recompensing all exporters who incur additional costs as a result of delays and, by comparison with other methods of compensation, minimises the need to divert resources from processing claims and eliminating payment delays.

Pollution

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the level of PCB emissions in the seas around Britain.

Mr. MacGregor: The quality status report prepared by scientists of North sea countries for the North sea conference in 1987 recorded West German and Dutch data that 3·3 tonnes per year of PCBs entered the North sea from continental rivers. Levels of PCBs in United Kingdom rivers are below detectable levels. The extent of release of PCBs into the North sea from the Piper Alpha platform is being assessed at present.

Food Safety

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that salmonella enteritidis is absent from eggs that might be consumed by the public.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 1 December 1988]:* We are taking this issue very seriously. I am holding meetings with the various sectors of the industry—the eggs, poultry and feedingstuffs industries and the retailers. All are aware of the need to act to reassure consumers—their customers. Steps are being taken as a result. A comprehensive code of practice has already been agreed under the poultry health scheme. The eggs industry, which has already issued new instructions for producers, is meeting today to discuss the adoption of a similar code of practice. A joint feeding stuffs working party met yesterday to consider how we might tighten up enforcement of the feedingstuffs orders, and the preparation of a tough code of practice. A further working party, comprising scientists from my Ministry, the Department of Health and the egg industry have been studying urgently the scientific background to these outbreaks and will make recommendations soon.

All this is in addition to the excellent work of the State Veterinary Service, investigating every outbreak of salmonella enteritidis.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the implications for research into salmonella in poultry of the loss of three AFRC scientists at Bristol engaged in work related to food safety with regard to salmonella in poultry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 29 November 1988]:* My Department undertakes ongoing reviews of all commissioned research. Following an extensive review of MAFF commissioned research in microbiology involving consultations with the Department of Health, the Public Health Laboratory Service, the AFRC Institute for Food Research, the food research associations and representatives of the food industry it was decided that work on manipulation of the microbial flora of the gut of young chicks should cease from April 1989 since it was now at the stage where the work was ready for industry to develop. This will not constitute a reduction in Government support on microbiological research, such as on salmonella. The funding is to be diverted to other important microbiological work. The work had been supported by MAFF and the AFRC for more than 10 years. Considerable effort has been made by the Institute for Food Research to interest the industry in the techniques which have been developed. Unfortunately, practical difficulties associated with the technique have proved unattractive to both the veterinary pharmaceutical and poultry industries at present. If future developments should make the work commercially feasible, and industry decides to come forward with funding, the work can be picked up again.

My Department commissions more than £1 million of research each year into the microbiological safety of food and gives a high priority to salmonella control. The deployment of staff at the IFR Bristol is a matter for the AFRC.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many community psychiatric nurses there have been in Northern Ireland in each of the last two years.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1987	115
1988	127

Beef

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he will put forward to provide alternative financial support for Northern Ireland beef farmers for the anticipated loss of £2·2 million should the proposal to end calf premium on 31 December be implemented.

Mr. Viggers: The ending of calf premium in Northern Ireland cannot be considered in isolation from the European Commission's overall proposals for revision of the beef regime. It is the Government's intention to seek adequate and fair premium support for beef producers in all areas of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to oppose any limitations of numbers of male animals eligible for Euro-premium and seek to persuade the European Commission that beef produced from maiden heifers in Northern Ireland should qualify for any headage payment paid out on male animals.

Mr. Viggers: The European Commission's proposals for reform of the beef regime include termination of the beef variable premium and calf premium and the introduction of a special premium on male animals, subject to a headage limit, and an increase in the suckler cow premium. Difficult and detailed negotiations on this proposed package are still in progress. The Government's objectives are to seek adequate and fair premium support for beef producers in all parts of the United Kingdom at a reasonable cost to the Community budget and the United Kingdom taxpayer.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will seek to extend the operation of the United Kingdom beef variable premium until at least the end of the beef marketing year.

Mr. Viggers: If it is decided to discontinue the beef variable premium, the Government will seek adequate arrangements for orderly transition to any new premium system which is agreed. I cannot at this stage give any specific commitment on timing of changes because this depends on the progress of negotiations in and decisions by the EC Council of Agriculture Ministers.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many beef cows in Northern Ireland herds do not qualify for premium because of the rules relating to the proportion of income derived from farming and the proportion of time spent on the farm; what is the estimated loss of income by these rules to the Northern Ireland agriculture industry annually; and if he will seek to amend these rules so that all beef cows qualify for full premiums payable.

Mr. Viggers: The information is not available in the form requested. In the 1987-88 scheme year income checks were applied to 4,468 claims in Northern Ireland and as a result 1,569 claims (involving 6,224 cows and some £208,000 in premium) were withdrawn or failed the main occupation test. The qualifying rules of the beef cow premium scheme are laid down in EC legislation. They will be considered during the current review of the EC beef support arrangements. Any proposed amendment such as removal of the main occupation test will be studied carefully with regard to its budgetary and administrative impact.

Road Accident Statistics

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many road accidents and how many injuries and death arising therefrom were reported during each of the past three years on the main public roads between Greyabbey and Kircubbin, County Down.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Theft

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many incidents of theft were reported to Greyabbey Royal Ulster Constabulary station during each of the past three years.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The numbers of incidents of theft reported to Greyabbey Royal Ulster Constabulary station during the past three years were:

	Numbers
1986	70
1987	98
1988 (to end of October)	37

Ards Peninsula

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Royal Ulster Constabulary stations there are in the Ards peninsula south of the line between Newtownards and Donaghadee; and what is the estimated winter and summer population in that sector of the Ards peninsula.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The Ards peninsula falls within the Royal Ulster Constabulary sub-divisional area of Newtownards which comprises Newtownards, Donaghadee and Portaferry.

South of the line between Newtownards and Donaghadee, there is one Royal Ulster Constabulary station. It is estimated that the residential population of the area is approximately 21,000 and that in the peak holiday period the average number of staying visitors is about 2,000.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make it his policy to support a system of regional quotas to interested slaughtering plants on the basis of recent volumes as a means of ensuring an element of competition for available quotas and maintaining a place for smaller meat plants if proposals to invite tenders for intervention purchasing of beef proceed.

Mr. Viggers: No. Little information is available on how the tendering system for beef intervention proposed by the EC Commission will operate but regional or slaughter plant quotas based on recent volumes is not envisaged.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps will be taken by Her Majesty's Government to prevent large monopolistic interests from gaining control of the meat industry in Northern Ireland to the detriment of small meat plants by the proposed tendering for beef intervention.

Mr. Viggers: The legal text of the European Commission proposal to introduce tendering for beef intervention provides that

> "the tender procedures must ensure equality of access for all persons interested".

The Government supports such an undertaking which, if approved by the EC Council of Ministers, should prevent large monopolistic interests from obtaining unfair advantages in the Northern Ireland meat industry.

Terrorism

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the rate of changes in the number of *(a)* incidents, *(b)* injuries and *(c)* deaths arising from terrorist acts between the three years before 15 November 1985 and the three years since that date.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information is as follows:

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	[1] *1985*	[2] *1985*	*1986*	*1987*	[3] *1988*
Deaths	97	77	64	47	7	61	93	87
Injuries	525	510	866	828	88	1,450	1,130	923
Shooting attacks	382	290	230	169	27	285	489	305
Explosions	219	266	193	128	20	172	236	220

[1] 1 January to 14 November.

[2] 15 November to 31 December.

[3] To 31 October.

Plastic Bullets

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much compensation has been paid as a result of rubber and plastic bullet injuries in Northern Ireland each year since 1968.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information requested is not readily available since 1968 and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, since 1982 compensation paid as a result of rubber and plastic bullet injuries is as follows:

	£
1982	39,250
1983	5,515
1984	57,800
1985	59,751
1986	245,250
1987	96,050
1988	[1] 7,750

[1] To October.

EMPLOYMENT

Statutory Minimum Wages

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many instances have been discovered since 1979 of employers breaking the law in failing to pay statutory minimum wages according to wage council agreements; and how many resultant prosecutions there have been.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is not available in the precise form requested because wages inspectorate statistics about compliance with wages orders are compiled on the basis of establishments rather than employers. With that proviso, the figures sought are shown in the following table.

Establishments underpaying and prosecutions for failing to pay not less than the legal minimum

	Number	*Prosecutions*
1979	10,969	12
1980	12,154	8
1981	10,074	8
1982	9,269	6
1983	9,842	2
1984	9,466	2
1985	9,064	2
1986	8,205	2
1987	4,443	4
[1] 1988	4,778	[2] 10

[1] At 30 October.

[2] At 30 November.

Establishments are classified as underpaying if one or more workers is found to be underpaid. In the typical case only one or two workers are affected. In 1987 the proportion of workers found to be underpaid in all checks conducted by the wages inspectorate was 3 per cent.

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to increase the staff of the nuclear installations inspectorate.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive plans to increase the number of nuclear installations inspectors working in the inspectorate from the current level of 127·5 (1 November 1988) to 140 by 1 April 1989.

Health and Safety

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in the *Official Report* the total number of registered workplaces, the total number of employers and the number of factory inspectors who inspect workplaces for each Health and Safety Executive area for the years 1974 to 1987 inclusive.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is not available in the form requested.

The Health and Safety Executive does not hold information on the number of workplaces registered with the factory inspectorate for the years 1974 to 1977. The number of registered fixed premises for the years 1978 to 1987 is as follows:

Date	*Number of Premises*
1 January 1978	280,716
1 January 1979	300,718
1 January 1980	309,915
1 January 1981	309,100
[1]1 January 1982	576,456
1 January 1983	468,609
1 January 1984	393,237
31 March 1985	395,860
31 March 1986	399,885
31 March 1987	401,815

[1] The figure for 1982 is the first of those produced from a computerised database which was based on the Department of Employment census. The database was initially inflated by premises for which the Health and Safety Executive was not the enforcing authority and accounts for the high figures in 1982 and 1983.

Figures for the total number of registered fixed premises in each HSE area for the years 1978 to 1987 are not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Figures for the total number of employers for the years 1974 to 1987 inclusive are not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Figures for the number of factory inspectors who inspect workplaces for each HSE area between 1974 and 1979 could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The number of factory inspectors employed in each HSE area on 1 April each year between 1980 and 1987 is as follows:

Area	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
South West	32·0	30·0	28·0	27·0	26·0	26·0	26·0	29·0
South	30·0	28·0	27·0	27·0	29·0	26·0	27·5	27·5
South East	25·0	25·0	25·0	23·0	22·0	25·0	24·0	26·5
London North West[1]	30·0	26·0	24·0	22·0	21·0	—	—	—
London North	25·0	23·0	22·0	22·0	20·0	36·0	35·5	36·0
London South	30·0	37·0	34·0	32·0	28·0	40·0	35·0	34·0
East Anglia	24·5	25·5	27·0	26·0	25·0	24·5	25·0	21·5
Northern Home Counties	26·0	21·0	20·0	19·0	20·0	22·0	23·0	24·5
East Midlands	29·0	26·0	24·0	23·0	23·0	23·0	25·0	26·0
West Midlands	44·0	44·0	40·0	37·0	33·0	32·0	32·0	32·0
Wales	33·0	31·0	29·0	23·0	23·0	23·0	25·0	26·0
Marches	28·0	27·0	25·0	23·0	22·0	24·0	25·5	23·5
North Midlands	31·0	30·0	29·0	26·0	25·0	27·0	23·0	23·0
South Yorkshire	33·0	31·0	28·0	29·5	29·0	27·0	24·5	24·0
West and North Yorkshire	37·0	35·0	29·0	31·0	29·0	35·5	33·5	31·5
Greater Manchester	34·5	34·5	33·0	33·0	32·0	33·5	28·5	30·5
Merseyside	29·0	28·0	26·0	25·0	27·0	25·0	26·0	25·0
North West	26·5	30·5	28·0	27·0	25·0	28·0	24·0	23·0
North East	38·0	37·0	33·0	32·0	31·0	31·0	30·0	31·0
Scotland East	33·0	31·0	32·0	27·0	25·0	26·0	23·0	23·0
Scotland West	34·0	33·0	30·0	28·0	26·0	27·0	25·0	25·0

[1] The London north-west office is no longer regarded as a separate area office. Factory inspectors located there are outstationed from the London, north or London, south area offices.

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list *(a)* the number of prosecutions and *(b)* the average fine under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act for the years 1974 to 1987 inclusive.

Mr. Nicholls: The table shows the available information.

Year	*Informations laid*			*Convictions obtained*			*Average fine per conviction (£)*		
	[1,2]*All*	[3]*FAID*	[4]*FI*	[1,2]*All*	[3]*FAID*	[4]*FI*	[1,2]*All*	[3]*FAID*	[4]*FI*
1975			2,956			2,732			81
1976			2,174			2,010			94
1977			2,814			2,546			105
1978			2,603			2,364			134
1979		2,427			2,227			184	
1980		2,624			2,416			180	
1981		1,892			1,654			189	
1982		2,342			2,057			233	
1983	2,238			1,941			252		
1984	2,209			1,944			313		
1985	2,231			1,915			436		
1986 (January to March)[5]	541			467			438		
1986-87[6]	2,199			1,771			410		
1987-88[6]	2,322			2,002			[7]794		

[1] Data include prosecutions taken by factory and agricultural inspectorates, explosives inspectorate, Her Majesty's mines and quarries inspectorate, nuclear installations inspectorate, railway inspectorate and the petroleum engineering division of the Department of Energy.

[2] All figures exclude the results of prosecutions taken by local authorities. The latest information for local authorities (LAs) relates to 1986-87, for which we know of about 390 informations laid under the Health and Safety at Work Act, and 233 under other associated legislation. For 1986-87 the number of convictions was about 530 in total. No information is collected on the average fine.

[3] Factory and agricultural inspectorates only.

[4] Factory inspectorate only.

[5] Data for the period 1 January 1986 to 31 March 1986.

[6] Data for the year commencing 1 April 1986 and provisional data for the year commencing 1 April 1987.

[7] The average includes fines of £500,000 and £250,000 against BP following three fatal accidents. Without these convictions the average fine would have been £420.

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases were taken, under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act, to the Crown courts during 1987; and what was the average fine.

Mr. Nicholls: The following table gives the available information for the year commencing 1 April 1987.

Proceedings instituted by the Health and Saftey Executive's factory and agricultural inspectorates, 1987-88

	Number
Informations laid	[1]30
Convictions obtained	19
Average fine per conviction (£)	[2]41,224

[1] These figures are for HSE inspectors only.

Information on prosecutions could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost.

[2] The average includes fines of £500,000 and £250,000 against BP following three fatal accidents. Without these convictions the average fine would have been £1,956.

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list *(a)* the total number and *(b)* the total number of resignations of factory inspectors for the years 1974 to 1987 inclusive.

Mr. Nicholls: Figures for the number of factory inspectors in post in HSE are only available from 1 July 1975 and details for resignations only readily available from 1979.

	Number of factory inspectors	*Number of resignations in each year*
1 July 1975	557	n/a
1 April 1976	624	n/a
1 April 1977	676	n/a
1 April 1978	695	n/a
1 April 1979	742	36
1 April 1980	759	26
1 April 1981	735	28
1 April 1982	678	13
1 April 1983	654	14
1 April 1984	627	16
1 April 1985	652	15
1 April 1986	623	18
1 April 1987	621	37

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list *(a)* the total number of registered premises, *(b)* the total number of employees and *(c)* the total number of inspections by environmental health officers during the years 1974 to 1987, inclusive.

Mr. Nicholls: This information is only available centrally for enforcement activities by local authorities under health and safety legislation for the years 1981 to 1986-87. Estimated figures from local authority returns are set out below. The figures for premises cover those registered statutorily under Factories Act 1961, Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963, and also those collected informally by the local authorities where no registration requirement exists.

Year	*Number of premises*	*Number of employees (millions)*	*Total number of visits*[1]
1981	879,000	5·9	703,000
1982	874,000	6·3	667,000
1983	897,000	5·7	639,000
1984	958,000	5·8	655,000
1985	940,000	5·6	610,000
1986-87	958,000	5·8	567,000

[1] These figures refer to visits paid by all local authority officers appointed under the HSW Act (these included technical assistants, EHOs and specialist health and safety inspectors).

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how frequently environmental health officers inspect workplaces registered under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act.

Mr. Nicholls: There is no requirement to register premises under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, and there is no set frequency for inspection.

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list in the *Official Report (a)* the total number of workplaces and *(b)* the total number of Health and Safety Executive workplace inspections for the years 1974 to 1987, inclusive;

(2) if he will give *(a)* the offences and *(b)* the fines for each of the 25 prosecutions taken under the 1987 Health and Safety Executive blitz on construction sites.

Mr. Nicholls: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the ages of the currently employed factory inspectors.

Mr. Nicholls: The ages of factory inspectors currently employed by the Health and Safety Executive on 30 November 1988 are as follows:

	Number
All Grades Aged (22 - 30)	95
All Grades Aged (31 - 40)	240
All Grades Aged (41 - 50)	164
All Grades Aged (51 - 60)	118
All Grades Aged (61 - 65)	2
Total	619

Employment Training

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the implications to the Lancashire Trust for Nature Conservation of the change from the Manpower Services Commission's community programme to employment training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Following discussions between local officials of the Training Agency and representatives of the

Lancashire trust for nature conservation, the trust's community programme Seaforth nature reserve project has continued into employment training and is now run by the METAL organisation. Currently all the places on the Seaforth nature reserve project are filled and local officials see no reason why the project should not continue to play a valuable role within employment training.

Employment Act 1988 (Commencement)

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has made a commencement order in respect of the remaining provisions of the Employment Act 1988.

Mr. Cope: The Employment Act 1988 (Commencement No. 2) Order has been published today. It provides that section 8 (use of funds for indemnifying unlawful conduct) and sections 19 to 21 (appointment of and assistance from the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members) will come into force on 5 December 1988. Section 15 (independent scrutiny of certain ballots and elections) and related provisions in schedule 3 to the Act will come into force on 1 February 1989.

HEALTH

Mental Illness

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has taken to ensure that regional health authorities conform to his advice contained in the policy paper on mental illness services, Cmnd 9674, on the retention in mental illness hospitals of patients whose condition is unlikely to improve; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Currie: The responsibility for assessing and providing in-patient care rests with health authorities. This will include long-stay facilities, in-patient and out-patient work and new developments such as hospital hostels. The main method by which health authorities are held accountable for their work is by annual ministerial review. Mental illness services are included in these reviews.

"Look After Your Heart"

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 95 health authorities which received "Look After Your Heart" grants in the first year of the campaign and the statutory authority under which the Department made such grants.

Mrs. Currie: The list is as follows:

East Cumbria
Sheffield
Hastings
Worcester
Warrington
Bolton
Newcastle
Aylesbury Vale
West Berkshire
Medway
Kettering
Riverside
South Bedfordshire
Northumberland
Macclesfield
North Birmingham
Frenchay
Isle of Wight
Winchester
Brighton
City and Hackney
West Essex
Huddersfield
Huntingdon
Doncaster
West Cumbria
Durham
Redbridge
North Bedfordshire
West Norfolk and Wisbech
North Tees
Trent RHA and Sheffield DHA
Basildon and Thurrock
West Lambeth
Central Manchester
Sunderland
Southampton and South West Hampshire
Brent
East Dorset
Bath
Liverpool
Milton Keynes
Northampton
Dewsbury
South West Herts
South Tyneside
Islington
Worcester and District
Mid Essex
Oxfordshire
Scarborough
North Staffordshire
North Derbyshire
West Dorset
Central Nottinghamshire
Leicester
Mid Downs
East Berkshire
Hampstead
Bloomsbury
North West Hertfordshire
East Suffolk
Harrow
Eastbourne
Bexley
Bolton
South Lincolnshire
Barnet
East Hertfordshire
Harrogate
Southern Derbyshire
Newham
West Birmingham
Gateshead
Lewes
Torbay
Central Birmingham
Wolverhampton

Some health authorities received more than one grant.

The grants were made on behalf of the "Look After Your Heart" campaign by the Health Education Authority under article 3(2)(h) of the Health Education Authority (Establishment and Constitution) Order 1987.

Mentally Ill Patients

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amounts provided in *(a)* the current and *(b)* the forthcoming year by each health region in England and Wales for bridging funds for local care of patients discharged or excluded from mental hospitals; how much, in each case, is provided for the long-term patients still to be discharged from hospitals; and how much for those already discharged from hospital; and what the amount per patient is in each case.

Mrs. Currie: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 28 November 1988 at columns *143-144*. The information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Pharmaceutical Staff

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn on 29 November, if he will list those district health authorities in England from which he has received reports of vacancies for qualified pharmaceutical staff.

Mr. Mellor: We have received reports of shortages over a long period and by different people. No central record has been kept.

Rutland Memorial Hospital

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effect of the closure of Rutland memorial hospital on the level of maternity care in the area.

Mrs. Currie: Leicestershire health authority is currently consulting on proposals to close maternity services at Rutland memorial hospital. Since these proposals could come to Ministers for a decision if agreement cannot be reached locally, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on this at present.

AIDS

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on policy towards prevalence screening for HIV.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We have now completed consideration of comments arising from consultation on the report of the working group on the monitoring and surveillance of HIV infection and AIDS (the Smith report). Assisted by these comments we have reached a decision on anonymous and named screening for HIV. We are grateful to the large number of organisations which have let us have their comments.

Anonymous screening is the testing under conditions of total anonymity, for HIV infection of blood from patients who have voluntarily given it for other tests, but who have not specifically consented to an HIV test. Before any of the blood taken is tested for HIV identifying details are removed from the blood sample so as to render the test wholly anonymous. The balance of scientific opinion strongly favours such testing as the best way to obtain information about the overall prevalance of HIV infection by age and sex in the various parts of the country, and the rate at which it is spreading in the population at large. The Cox report, on short-term prediction of HIV infection and AIDS in England and Wales, which was published on 30 November, explicitly recommends anonymous testing.

The Government see no legal obstacle to such testing. From the layman's point of view, we also see no ethical objections to the testing for scientific purposes of blood samples taken property in the first place for another purpose from a patient no longer identifiable.

We are therefore inviting the Medical Research Council to bring forward proposals within three months for a programme of anonymous screening.

The Smith report recommended setting up large scale named antenatal studies, which the report believes should play an important role in identifying how far the infection has spread beyond the at-risk groups. Two such studies have been already announced and have begun in Dundee and Edinburgh. These studies are extremely important because of the higher prevalence of HIV in drug abusers in Scotland. We accept in principle the case for a programme of named studies in England as recommended in the report but believe many important matters of detail as to scale and groups to be tested need to be determined. It is of course essential that the patients in these tests are volunteers who have been advised fully before the test and will if they wish to be told the results afterwards. We are therefore asking the MRC to let us have detailed proposals on such studies within three months. Further named studies will enable comparisons to be made of the results of surveys based on anonymous testing and on named testing.

The Smith report made a number of other useful recommendations concerning epidemiological studies of particular groups and improvements to the collection and collation of data. These recommendations were generally welcomed and we are asking the MRC, public health laboratory service and other bodies concerned to take them forward. £1·7 million has been made available to the MRC in 1989-90 for research into the spread of HIV infection and AIDS including such studies. The adequacy of this sum will be kept under review.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to ensure that the reporting of positive HIV test results is covered by the confidentiality provisions of paragraph 3 of the schedule to the AIDS (Control) Act 1987; and when he expects the reports under the Act to be published.

Mr. Mellor: Under the AIDS (Control) (Contents of Reports) (No. 2) Order 1988, the reporting of positive HIV test results in the reports required under the AIDS (Control) Act 1987 are covered by the confidentiality provisions of paragraph 3 of the schedule of that Act. Under section 3 of the Act, the reports have to be published by the health authority or board by which they are made. All the reports for the period April 1987 to March 1988 are now available.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the current annual cost to the national blood transfusion service of the use of existing tests to identify antibodies of the HIV-2 virus; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is *(a)* the number and *(b)* the proportion of total blood donors currently screened in respect of the HIV-2 virus; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what would be the cost to the national blood transfusion service of full-scale testing of blood from all donors in respect of the detection of HIV-2 virus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Potential blood donors are given preliminary screening by medical questionnaire. Donations from those who are accepted are routinely tested for HIV-1 and other diseases at the regional transfusion centres of the national blood transfusion service.

Since June 1988 samples of donations from donors who have visited specified West African countries where HIV-2 is more common have been referred to the public health laboratory service for testing for antibodies to HIV-2.

Of the donations collected between June and November 1988 around 4,500 (0·4 per cent.) have been tested and all have been found negative. The cost of these tests is not readily identifiable.

It is not possible to give the precise cost of testing all donations for HIV-2 because an evaluation programme to identify a suitable test for use by the NBTS has not yet been completed. However, it is estimated that testing all blood donations for antibodies to HIV-2 would cost the NBTS between £1 million and £2 million annually. The need for testing on a wider basis is kept under constant review.

Dalkon Shield

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what, to the knowledge of his Department, is the deadline for claims for compensation for women injured by the Dalkon shield;

(2) if his Department will make moneys available to regional health authorities in order that they may carry out locally based advertising campaigns alerting women to any rights they may have in regard to compensation for injuries caused by the Dalkon shield;

(3) how many British women have, to the knowledge of his Department, registered claims for compensation against the manufacturers of the Dalkon shield;

(4) if he will list in the *Official Report* any publicity conducted by the manufacturers of the Dalkon shield in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Currie: In the years following their voluntary withdrawal of the Dalkon shield from the United Kingdom market, the manufacturers A. H. Robins have written to doctors on a number of occasions and have placed advertisements in the women's press. In early 1986 the company conducted media publicity, in accordance with the directions of the United States bankruptcy court, to publicise the deadline of 30 April 1986 for filing claims. We understand that claims were subsequently received from over 3,000 British women.

We are aware of no subsequent court directions on publicity but we understand that a trust established in the United States has set aside compensation funds for claims received before 31 December 1988 which are successful.

Decisions about funding local advertising campaigns are for individual health authorities.

Elderly People (Deaths)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people over 75 years died in each of the last 12 months.

Mrs. Currie: The latest available data for mortality by month of occurrence and age are shown in the table; figures for 1988 are provisional, and the later months in particular are likely to be affected by late registration.

Number of deaths by month of occurrence, aged 75 and over, September 1987 to August 1988
England and Wales

Month of occurrence	*Males*	*Females*	*Persons*
1987			
September	9,192	13,353	22,545
October	10,557	15,613	26,170
November	10,488	15,337	26,025
December	12,516	18,314	30,830
1988			
January[1]	12,394	18,275	30,699
February	11,558	16,889	28,447
March	12,380	18,998	31,378
April	10,621	16,057	26,678
May	10,005	14,891	24,896
June	9,497	14,054	23,551
July	9,556	13,869	23,425
August	8,844	13,181	22,025

[1] Provisional.

Haemophiliacs

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made at the blood products laboratory at Elstree towards meeting the needs of haemophiliacs in England and Wales for factor VIII.

Mrs. Currie: The £60 million blood products laboratory is now producing factor VIII at record levels, but it is not yet possible to predict when we shall no longer need to import factor VIII. Yields so far are lower than expected though higher than the commercial producers', and a reappraisal of the buffer stock of plasma has shown it to be less than previously thought. Action is being taken by the central blood laboratories authority to increase yields and by the blood transfusion service to increase the collection of plasma which will lead to higher output over the next three years.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has any information on diagnostic tests for multiple sclerosis which involve applied kinesiology and which can identify foods or other factors to which sufferers are allergic.

Mrs. Currie *[holding answer 1 December 1988]:* Kinesiology is an alternative medical technique. There is no evidence of the value of applied kinesiology as a diagnostic test for multiple sclerosis. There are already effective diagnostic tests for this disease. There is no convincing evidence that diet has any role in precipitating or affecting the course of mutiple sclerosis. It is advisable for people with mutiple sclerosis to pay the same attention to diet and allergic reaction as other people.

Nurses (Regrading)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the money awarded for regrading to each district health authority in the Merseyside and north-west health region; if he will publish a list showing how nurses were regraded in each district health authority in the Merseyside and north-west region and the criteria used; and if he will specify *(a)* the amount of money allocated to Warrington health authority and the national average sum allocated to health authorities, *(b)* the grades awarded in the Warrington health authority and those awarded nationally, *(c)* the criteria for grading used by the Warrington health authority and those used nationally and *(d)* the national average pay rise for nurses resulting from regrading.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 29 November 1988]:* For details of the outcome of regrading in individual district health authorities, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) on 1 December. All health authorities have carried out the regrading process in accordance with the grading definitions agreed in the Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiation Council and the national guidance subsequently issued by my Department.

The national average increase in the pay bill arising from the nurses' pay award is 17·9 per cent including London supplements. Outside London, the average increase is 16·8 per cent.

The total allocation for the cost of the nurses pay award in England was £731 million, of which £34·9 million was allocated to Mersey regional health authority. These figures were based on regions' own estimates of the extra cost of regrading. Allocation of funds to districts is a matter for regional health authorities, and we do not hold figures centrally. For further information the hon. Member should consult the chairman of Mersey regional health authority.

ENERGY

Oil Rigs (Equipment)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many oil rigs have ceased operation as a result of the flexible hose in blow-out prevention equipment being found not to be able to withstand pressures of up to 15,000 lb per sq in; how many rigs in the North sea use this equipment; and what new advice he is issuing about use of these hoses.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Two oil rigs have ceased operation.

There are 23 oil rigs operating or currently available for use in controlled waters on the United Kingdom continental shelf and which are fitted with 15,000 pounds per square inch (psi) blowout prevention systems. The majority of these are engaged in operations where pressures above 10,000 psi will not be encountered.

My petroleum engineering division has advised oil companies using such equipment at higher pressures to define the maximum temperatures and pressures expected to occur in individual well operations and fully assess them against the flexible hose specifications. If a company is able to provide sufficient evidence to show that it is safe to continue or to resume operations I will consider giving the consent necessary under the terms and conditions of their licence. The division is also consulting interested parties with a view to issuing general guidance about the way in which this equipment should be used to ensure that it is safe at higher pressures.

Piper Alpha

Mr. McTaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he is taking to ensure that all the debris from the Piper Alpha disaster is brought to the surface as soon as possible.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Secretary of State could require the removal of debris only in the context of an abandonment programme. As I explained to the House on 30 November *Official Report*, columns 757 ans 764, before approving an abandonment programme subject to conditions, the Secretary of State must give the persons who submitted the programme an opportunity to make written representations about the proposed conditions (Petroleum Act 1987 section 4(3)). The conditions which the Secretary of State has proposed should be attached to his approval of the abandonment programme for Piper Alpha include: provisions that following survey, Occidental and its co-venturers shall if required by the Secretary of State move or remove from the sea bed such remains of the installations as he may direct. Given the character and size of the central debris pile and of the jacket members which it is proposed to topple, I do not think that total removal is likely to be practicable. The Secretary of State advised Occidental and its co-venturers on 1 December of the conditions that he proposed to attach to the approval of their abandonment programme.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 142**

SESSION 1988–89

22nd November–2nd December 1988

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

INDEX—SESSION 1988/89

22 November 1988 — 2 December 1988

A1
Road accidents 163w
Road travel 419
Road works 419-20

A1-M1 link
Road construction 208w

A31
Stoney Cross 165w

A38
Saltash bypass 423

A41
Transport of hazardous materials 208w

A69
Road works 425

A249
Road accidents 207w
Road traffic 207w
Road works 207w
Roads 207w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Questions
Caribbean, Health services 302w
Nuclear weapons tests, NATO 222w
Transport, Greater London 415

ACAS
see Advisory Conciliation & Arbitration Service

Access to Parliament
Lobbying 365w, 396w
Speaker's rulings & statements (24:11:88) 239-40, 248, 251, 260, 261, 273, 274

Accident & emergency departments
Death 262w

Accommodation & Administration Subcommittee
431-2

Accounting
Prime Minister 345w

Acid rain
Nottingham 203w

ACPO
see Association of Chief Police Officers

Adams, Mr Allen
Questions
Board & lodging charges, Hostels 385-7w

Addresses to the Crown
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 6-13

Adelphi Building
144-5w
Dept of Health 144w

Adley, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 440
Questions
Agricultural land, Land use 96w
Buses, Greater London 420
Military alliances, France 232w
Palestine, Recognition of states 184w
Road accidents, Death 249w
Road traffic control 166w

Administrative costs
Housing benefits 412-3w

Administrative delays
Attendance allowance 389w
British citizenship 244-5w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 393w
Departmental correspondence 333w
Employment Training 111w
Hearing aids 193w
Housing benefits 43w
Immigration applications 393w
Members' correspondence 97w, 111w, 128w, 278w

Administrative delays—continued
Mobility allowance 389w

Adoption
Local government social services 382-3w

Adoption agencies
382-3w

Advertising controls
Telephone services 169w

Advertising Standards Authority
169w

Advice & Assistance (Scotland) (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Regulations 1988
Debates etc.
(01:12:88) 901

Advice & Assistance (Scotland) (Prospective Cost) (No 3) Regulations 1988
Debates etc.
(01:12:88) 901

Advisory Conciliation & Arbitration Service
192w, 358-60

Aerosols
Air pollution 405-6w
Labelling 405-6w

Afghanistan
USSR 295w

AFRC
see Agricultural & Food Research Council

Africa
International cooperation 296w
Ministers' visits abroad 304w

Age
Employment discrimination 273w
Employment Training 111w
Factory Inspectorate 434w

Age addition
Old persons' pensions 91w
Retirement pensions (24:11:88) 241-328

Age participation rates
Further education 79-82w
Higher education 79-84w

Agricultural & Allied Workers' National Trade Group
319w

Agricultural & Food Research Council
3w, 426w

"Agricultural & Food Research Council Annual Report, 1987/88"
3w

Agricultural education
Scotland 341w

Agricultural improvement scheme
100-1w

Agricultural land
328-9w
Land use 96w
Nitrates 96w
Planning permission 206w, 329w

Agricultural production
Beans 321w
Cereals 56-7w, 323w
Garlic 204w

Agricultural research
326w
Bovine somatotropin 325w
Pesticides 99w, 325-6w
Research finance 238w, 322w

Agricultural stabilisers
Sheep meat 865

Agricultural subsidies
Food prices 865

Agricultural surpluses
Cereals 858-9
Common agricultural policy 857-8

Agricultural surpluses—continued
Co-responsibility levy 858
EC action 858

Agriculture
EC action 326w
Employment 325w
Expenditure 327w
Nitrates 9-10w, 321-2w
Sites of special scientific interest 135w

Agriculture Improvement (Variation) (No 3) Scheme 1988
Debates etc.
(30:11:88) 732

AIDS
Screening 437-9w

Air pollution
Aerosols 405-6w
Carbon monoxide 277w
Climate 247-8w
Crown immunity 178w, 235w, 240w, 242w, 246w, 250w, 253w, 255w, 259w, 266w, 273-4w, 281w, 286w, 313w, 342-3w, 358w
District health authorities 190-1w
Energy research 125-6w
Methane 276w
NHS 188w

Air pollution control
201w
Carbon dioxide 421-2w
Chlorofluorocarbons 5-6w, 277w, 419-20w
Community health councils 191w
Dept of Education & Science 235w
Dept of Employment 273-4w
Dept of Energy 286w
Dept of the Environment 281w
Dept of Trade & Industry 253w
Dept of Transport 250w
Energy research 275w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 313w
Government departments 178w
Home Office 246w
Hospitals 191-2w
Lord Chancellor 259w
Ministry of Agriculture 240w
Ministry of Defence 266w
Nitrogen oxides 278-9w
Office of Arts & Libraries 342-3w
Private sector 200-1w
Scottish Office 255w
Treasury 358w
Welsh Office 242w

"Air Pollution from Crown Property"
191-2w

Air routes
Europe 163-4w

Air safety
Airmisses 52w
Low flying 214w

Air traffic control
161w
EC action 698
Leeds-Bradford Airport 407w

Aircraft
Aircraft noise 209-11w

Aircraft noise
Aircraft 209-11w
Noise control 211w
RAF Upper Heyford (30:11:88) 849-56

Airmisses
Air safety 52w

Aitken, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Intelligence services, Inquiries (23:11:88) 219, 220, 224
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 152-6, 212, 214
Questions
Merchant ships 561-2

Alarm missiles
566

Alcoholism
Drinking & driving 355w

Alexander, Mr Richard
Questions
Angola, Cuba 296-7w
Defence expenditure 217-8w

Alexander Fleming House
144w

Al-Fayed Investment Holdings
102w

Algeria
Civil disorder 308w

Alison, Rt Hon Michael, Second Church Estates Commissioner
Questions
Cathedrals, Building repairs 67w
Cathedrals, Church property 430-1
Cathedrals, Costs 428
Church buildings, Inner city areas 429
Hereford Cathedral, Mappa mundi 428, 431

Allen, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 797-800
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 122, 127
Questions
Acid rain, Nottingham 203w
Arts finance, Nottingham 342w
Brewing industry, Codes of practice 868
Carbon monoxide, Nottingham 131w. 421w
Channel tunnel, East Midlands 206-7w
Chiropody, Home care services 259w
Chiropody, Nottingham Health Authority 187-8w
City technology colleges, Nottingham 76w
Council house sales, Nottingham 131w
Councillors' interests, Shareholders 127w
Cycling 206-7w
Defence land, Nottingham 349w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Nottingham 181w
Export rebates, Food industry 425w
Eye tests 259w
Football, Arrests 130w
House of Commons chamber, Lighting 126-7w, 360w, 365w
Housing action trusts, Nottingham 62w
Housing benefits, Nottingham 262w
Intelligence services, Public service pensions 271w
Members' facilities, Palace of Westminster 432
Mortgage relief, Tax yields 104w
Planning appeals, Nottingham 198-9w
Public Accounts Commission 429-30
Retirement pensions, Social security recipients 181-2w
River pollution, Dieldrin 132w
Sherwood forest, Defence land 234w
Supply Estimates, Intelligence services 104w
10 Downing Street, Press 34w
Unemployment, Statistics 272w
Water pollution, Nottingham 131w
Water supply, Lead pollution 364w

Alternative energy
Electricity generation 125w

Alternative medicine
Multiple sclerosis 379w

Alternatives to prison
Mentally disturbed offenders 70-1w
"Punishment Custody & the Community" 75w

Alton, Mr David
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 261
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 772, 774, 776-7, 781

Alton, Mr David—continued
• *Questions*
Adoption, Local government social services 382-3w
Animal welfare, Dogs 398-9w
Breathalysers 399-400w
Church buildings, Inner city areas 429
Departmental correspondence, Administrative delays 333w
Drinking & driving, Convictions 400w
Electronic surveillance, Offenders 74w
Extradition, EC action 698-9
Kurdistan, Refugees 299w
McCartney, Ronald, Prisoners' transfers 395w
Magistrates, Probation officers 75w
Mercury, Fish 198w
Nuclear submarines, Radioactive waste disposal 233w
Private Members' Bills, House of Commons procedure 433
"Punishment Custody & the Community", Alternatives to prison 75w
River Mersey, River pollution 283w
Road accidents, Drinking & driving 354w
Safer cities scheme, Liverpool 411w
Sea pollution, Waste disposal 205w
Settle-Carlisle railway 166-7w
Social security benefits rules, Pensioners 89-90w
Tanks, Defence contracts 104w

Alzheimer's disease
180-1w, 385-6w

Ambulance Council
380w

Ambulance services
Glasgow 417w
Manchester 193w
Manpower 380w

Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 354-7, 366

Amess, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 98-102
Questions
Civil servants 412w
Poland, Foreign policy 302-3w
Student loans, Costs 353w
Student Support Review 353w
Student Support Review, Evidence 353w
Student Unions Review 353w
Student Unions Review, Civil service manpower 353-4w
Wallenberg, Raoul 401w

Amnesty International
295w

Amos, Mr Alan
Questions
Angola, Cuba 297w
Channel tunnel, North East region 155w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 11-2w
GATT 328w
Hexham 343w
Low flying, Hexham 214w

Anderson, Mr Donald
Questions
Front line states, Ministers' visits abroad 293w
Southern Africa, Peace negotiations 697

Angola
Armed forces deployment 696
Cuba 296-7w
Peace negotiations 296-7w
UNITA 288w

Animal experiments
Educational institutions 177w

Animal feed
Cereals 204w
Trading standards departments 321w

Animal welfare
Dogs 398-9w
Treaties 398-9w

Animals
Cremation 57w

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986
Questions
177w

Annual reports
281w

Antarctic
Tourism 333w

Antarctic Treaty
Voting methods 333w

Appeals
Immigration applications 311-4w
Whitley councils 253w

Arbuthnot, Mr James
Questions
Iran-Iraq war, Peace negotiations 701

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Questions
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 880
Universal Declaration of Human Rights 300w

Ards peninsula
Police stations 428w

Argentina
Falkland Islands 307w
Foreign policy 689
Helicopters 224w

Armed forces
Intimidation 349w
Racial discrimination 225w
USSR 220w
Warsaw Pact 227w, 265w

Armed forces casualties
Compensation 225w

Armed forces civilians
Relocation of employees 569
Teachers 233-4w

Armed forces deployment
Angola 696
Northern region 569

Armed forces medical services
NHS 228w

Armed forces pensions
Widows' benefits 227w

Armed forces recruitment
Armed forces strength 232w
Territorial Army 224w

Armed forces reserves
228w
Employment 215-6w

Armed forces strength
Armed forces recruitment 232w
Army in Northern Ireland 213-4w

Arms control
248w, 307w

Arms control negotiations
Conventional weapons 231w
Trident 560
Trident missiles 562

Arms exports
South Africa 185w

Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 216
Questions
A1 420
Child minding 150-1w

Armstrong, Ms Hilary—continued
Class sizes, Local education authorities 17-9w
Cost per pupil, Local education authorities 17w
Day nurseries 150w, 152w
NATO Nuclear Planning Group 219w
Nursery schools 83-6w
Play groups 146w
Pre-school education, Local education authorities 15-7w

Army
Career structure 350w
Intimidation 223-4w

Army in Northern Ireland
Armed forces strength 213-4w

Army strength
264-5w
Territorial Army 231-2w

Arnold, Mr Jacques
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 91
Questions
Western European Union 304w

Arnold, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 41-3

Arrests
Football 130w, 274-5w

Artillery
51w

Arts finance
British Council 330-2w
Nottingham 342w

ASA
see Advertising Standards Authority

Asbestos
Cancer hazards (25:11:88) 407-14
Leeds (25:11:88) 407-14

Ashby, Mr David
Questions
Country Landowners' Association, Set-aside schemes 323w

Ashdown, Mr Paddy
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 28-33
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 551
Questions
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 573

Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 244, 264-6
Questions
Air pollution control 201w
Air pollution control, Dept of Education & Science 235w
Air pollution control, Dept of Employment 273-4w
Air pollution control, Dept of Energy 286w
Air pollution control, Dept of the Environment 281w
Air pollution control, Dept of Trade & Industry 253w
Air pollution control, Dept of Transport 250w
Air pollution control, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 313w
Air pollution control, Government departments 178w
Air pollution control, Home Office 246w
Air pollution control, Lord Chancellor 259w
Air pollution control, Ministry of Agriculture 240w
Air pollution control, Ministry of Defence 266w
Air pollution control, Office of Arts & Libraries 342-3w

Ashley, Rt Hon Jack—continued
Air pollution control, Private sector 200-1w
Air pollution control, Scottish Office 255w
Air pollution control, Treasury 358w
Air pollution control, Welsh Office 242w
Armed forces, Racial discrimination 225w
Attendance allowance, Handicapped 388w
Audiology technicians, Recruitment 197w
Audiology technicians, Training 197w
Audiology technicians, Vacancies 196-7w
District health authorities, Air pollution 190-1w
Ear nose & throat, Health service staff 195-6w
Ear nose & throat, Hospital waiting lists 196w
European Convention on Human Rights, Complaints 290-2w
Food poisoning 317w
Handicap benefits, Medical examinations 387-9w
Hearing aids 193-5w
Hearing aids, Administrative delays 193w
Hearing aids, Health services 194w
Hearing aids, NHS 194-6w
Hearing aids, Private health services 171w
Hearing aids, Voluntary organisations 195w
Hospitals, Waste disposal 191-2w
Multiple sclerosis, Alternative medicine 379w
Multiple sclerosis, Diagnosis 440w
Opren, Radiation hazards 192w
Reduced earnings allowance, Industrial disablement benefits 389w

Association of Chief Police Officers
Emergency planning 38w
Identity cards 74w

***Atkins, Mr Robert**, Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
European Regional Development Fund, Wakefield (29:11:88) 679, 685-6
Questions
Aerosols, Labelling 405-6w
British Approvals Board for Telecommunications, Telephone charges 9w
British Steel Corporation, Profit sharing 170w
Cars, West Germany 170w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Import controls 405w
Electric lighting, Retail trade 367w
Lead free petrol, Lawn mowers 366w
Manufactured goods, Manufactured exports 365-6w
Telephone services, Advertising controls 169w
Tobacco industry, Factory closures 366w

Atkinson, Mr David
Questions
Iraq, Chemical weapons 687-8
Parking, Pedestrian areas 408w
Tourist industry 369w
USSR, Uspensky, Slava 107w

Atomic Weapons Research Establishment
Audit 50w

Attendance allowance
Administrative delays 389w
Handicapped 388w

Audiology technicians
194w
Hearing aids 197w
Recruitment 197w
Training 197w
Vacancies 196-7w

Audit
Atomic Weapons Research Establishment 50w

Australia
Retirement pensions 263w

AWRE
see Atomic Weapons Research Establishment

Axle weights
Lorries 157-8w

Ayrshire
Bridging allowances 413w

Azores
Nature conservation 283w

BABT
see British Approvals Board for Telecommunications

BAe 146 aircraft
Queen's flight 229w

***Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth**, Secretary of State for Education and Science*
Questions
"Agricultural & Food Research Council Annual Report, 1987/88" 3w
City technology colleges, Curriculum 14-5w
City technology colleges, Educational finance 15w
City technology colleges, School admission 14w
"Economic & Social Research Council Annual Report, 1987/88" 3w
Educational finance, Inner London boroughs 19-20w
Grant maintained schools, Parents 15w
Higher education, Age participation rates 83-4w
Student loans 404-5w
Teacher training, Recruitment 10w

Baker, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Private Members' motions (30:11:88) 731
Questions
Agricultural research, Research finance 322w
Common agricultural policy, Eggs 866-7
Fire prevention, Private sector housing 244w
Nature conservation, EC action 422w
Speed limits, Rural areas 163w
Winterborne Zelstone 343w

Balance of trade
357w, 571-2, 574
Interest rates 357w
Japan 253w
Manufactured goods 250-1w, 253w

Baldry, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Aircraft noise, RAF Upper Heyford (30:11:88) 849-52, 856
Questions
Agricultural surpluses, Common agricultural policy 857
Local plans 282w
M40 422
M40, Road construction 165w
Manufacturing industries, Productivity 250w
Museums & galleries, Publicity 187w
Nurses, Industrial disputes 362-3
Ozone layer, International conferences 5-6w

Baltic republics of USSR
305w
Foreign policy 184w
United Nations 306w

Bank of England
357-8w

Banking Services Law Review Committee
105w

Banks, Mr Robert
Questions
Business statements 896

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (01:12:88) 886
By election writs, Epping Forest (23:11:88) 113-4

Banks, Mr Tony—continued
Channel tunnel, Railway network (02:12:88) 1023-4
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 792-3, 794, 798
Nicaragua, Disaster relief (29:11:88) 578
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 991, 992, 993, 995-9, 1001-2, 1004-5, 1008, 1013, 1015, 1017, 1018
Private notice question intervention (01:12:88) 884
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 29, 54
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 451
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 343, 352, 371, 381, 395-6
Questions
Agricultural surpluses, Common agricultural policy 857-8
Animals, Cremation 57w
British embassies, Ministers' visits abroad 49w
Business statements 237
Central America, USA 306w
Central Policy Review Staff, Costs 345-6w
Channel tunnel, Railway stations 155-6w
Civil defence, Nuclear weapons 38w
Emergency planning, Association of Chief Police Officers 38w
Emergency planning, Local authorities 38w
Emergency planning, Publicity 38w
Government grants to local authorities, Camden Borough Council 64w
Local government finance, Rent increases 199w
London Fire & Civil Defence Authority, Emergency planning 63-4w
London Fire Brigade, Privatisation 35w
M1, Road traffic 418
Marine Directorate, Civil service manpower 53w
Members' facilities, Palace of Westminster 434
Ministers' visits abroad, Mass media 345w
Ministers' visits abroad, Poland 35w
Ministers' visits abroad, USA 35w
Nicaragua, Disaster relief 13-4w
Official gifts, Reagan, Ronald 346w
Official gifts, USA 35w
Oil industry safety, Civil service manpower 47w
Prime Minister, Accounting 345w
Prime Minister, Expenditure 345w
Prime Minister, Ministerial policy advisors 344w
Public libraries, Finance 49w, 342w
Public order policing, Conferences 397w
Railway Inspectorate, Railway safety 53-4w
10 Downing Street, Expenditure 345w
10 Downing Street, Labour Party 346w
10 Downing Street, Silver 34w
Tidy Britain Group 64-5w
Transport, Greater London 52w
War casualties, Cemeteries 51-2w, 203-4w
War casualties, Civil defence 37w
War casualties, Cremation 47w
War casualties, Environmental health 61w
War casualties, Food contamination 57w
War casualties, NATO Civil Defence Committee 37w
War casualties, War graves 52w
War casualties, Water pollution 138w
Water pollution, EC law 138w

BAOR
Military aircraft 230w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 95-8
Questions
Chile 288w
NATO, Theatre nuclear weapons 218w

Barnes, Mrs Rosie
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 514-7
Questions
EC aid, Developing countries 69w
International Development Association, Foreign loans 69w
Kampuchea, Overseas aid 179w
Pre-school education, Equal Opportunities Commission 235w
World Bank, Foreign aid 70w

Barron, Mr Kevin
Questions
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 341-2w
Electricity tariffs, Privatisation 342w
Energy research, Air pollution 125-6w
Power stations, Construction 287w
Reduced earnings allowance, Retirement 385w

Bassingbourn barracks
Intimidation 349w

Batiste, Mr Spencer
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 494-6

Baton rounds
Northern Ireland 429w

Battle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Asbestos, Cancer hazards (25:11:88) 407-11
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 608
Questions
NATO, Theatre nuclear weapons 218w

Beal, Wayne
349w

Beans
Agricultural production 321w

Beaumont-Dark, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 161-3, 211
Questions
Defence procurement, Cost effectiveness 217w

Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 297
Questions
British Rail Engineering, Privatisation 157w
Child support 94-6w
Family credit, Take-up 389w
Income support 94w
Pensions, Earnings rules 413-4w
Severe weather payments, Social security recipients 95w
Social Fund, Community care 93-4w
Widows' benefits, Social security benefits uprating 414w

Bed & breakfast accommodation
360-1w

Bedford Trucks
226w

Beef
Northern Ireland 429-30w

Beef premiums
205w
Northern Ireland 427-8w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Questions
Beef, Northern Ireland 429-30w
Beef premiums, Northern Ireland 427-8w
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools 351w

Beggs, Mr Roy—continued
School meals, Northern Ireland 235-6w
Slaughterhouses, Northern Ireland 236w

Beith, Mr A J
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 767, 768, 775-8, 798
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 603, 611-5, 666
Settle-Carlisle railway, Public petitions (02:12:88) 965
Questions
A1, Road accidents 163w
Horticulture, Research finance 238w
VAT, Construction 267-8w

Belfast Education & Library Board
235-6w

Bell, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 142-3

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Questions
BAe 146 aircraft, Queen's flight 229w
Defence, Egypt 264w
South Africa 701-2
Unemployment, Norfolk 114w
"Way Forward", Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive 202w

Bendall, Mr Vivian
Questions
USSR, Emigration 109w

"Benefits for Disabled People"
182w

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 273
By election writs, Epping Forest (23:11:88) 114
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (30:11:88) 721-2
Intelligence services, Inquiries (23:11:88) 224
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 126, 149, 156-61

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 763-4, 769, 771, 772, 790-2
Questions
Further education, Age participation rates 79-82w
Higher education admission, EC countries 81-2w
Higher education, Student numbers 81-2w
Higher education admission, Educational qualifications 176-7w
M66, Road construction 354-5w, 425-6
Mature students, Higher education admission 78-9w
NATO, Theatre nuclear weapons 218w
Student grants 78w
Student grants, Expenditure 77-8w
Student loans 77-8w
Student loans, Private rented housing 77w
Students, Social structure 80w
Universities, Student numbers 79-80w

Bennett, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 247-8
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 825, 833
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (30:11:88) 724
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 817-8
Private Members' motions (30:11:88) 731
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 643, 655-7
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 131
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 712
Questions
Monetary compensatory amounts 320w
NATO 220w

Bennett, Mr Nicholas—continued
Pembrokeshire coast national park, Expenditure 347-8w
Preseli Pembrokeshire District Council, Housing stock 349w
Railway transport, Private sector 427
RNAD Milford Haven 414-5w

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (30:11:88) 724
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 181, 187-9, 213, 215
Questions
AIDS, Screening 438-9w
Business statements 889-90
Employment Training, Lancashire Trust for Nature Conservation 434-5w
Nature Conservancy Council, Finance 423-4w
Nature conservation, Voluntary work 424w
Poultry, Salmonella 426w
Transport of hazardous materials 201w
Transport of hazardous materials, Export controls 201w
Transport of hazardous materials, Import controls 201-2w

Bevan, Mr David Gilroy
Questions
USA, Foreign policy 297w

Bexley
Unemployment 574

Bidwell, Mr Sydney
Questions
Lebanon, Hostages 300w
Roads, Greater London 153w

Birmingham
177w
Electorate 189-90w
Hotels 199w
Ministers' domestic visits 58w

Blackpool
Dept of Social Security local offices 263w

Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 381-4
Questions
Dept of Social Security local offices, Blackpool 263w
Palestine Liberation Organisation, UN General Assembly 689-90

Blood Products Laboratory
Factor VIII 440w

Blood tests
Scottish courts 256w

Blunkett, Mr David
Questions
Community charge 363w
Higher education, Local government expenditure 20-34w
Non-domestic rates, Local government revenue 63w
Potatoes, Pesticide residues 318-9w
Rate support grants, Revenue support grant 63w

BNFL
see British Nuclear Fuels

Board & lodging charges
Hostels 385-7w

Board of Inland Revenue
see Inland Revenue

Boateng, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 384-6
Questions
Defence land, Land values 213w
Roads, Greater London 153w

Boats
Light dues 166w

Body, Sir Richard
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 830-1
Public petitions, House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 846
Questions
Animal experiments, Educational institutions 177w
Warble fly, Pest control 238-9w

Bombings
Guildford 36w

Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Questions
Hedges & ditches, Government grants 859-60

Bookmakers
Office of Fair Trading 170w

Boscawen, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 261-4

Boswell, Mr Tim
Questions
Baltic republics of USSR 305w
EC budget, Common agricultural policy 321w
EC Fisheries Council 205-6w
Farm & conservation grants scheme 100-1w
Members, Postal services 95w

***Bottomley, Mr Peter**, Under-Secretary of State for Transport*
Debates etc.
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 531-2, 533, 537, 538, 540, 546-7, 549-51
Questions
A1 420
A1, Road accidents 163w
A1, Road travel 419
A1, Road works 419-20
A1-M1 link, Road construction 208w
A31, Stoney Cross 165w
A249, Road accidents 207w
A249, Road traffic 207w
A249, Road works 207w
A249, Roads 207w
Air pollution control, Dept of Transport 250w
Air routes, Europe 163-4w
Air safety, Airmisses 52w
Air traffic control 161w
Aircraft, Aircraft noise 209-11w
Aircraft noise, Noise control 211w
Buses, Greater London 420
Buses, Road damage 420
Bypasses, Road construction 158w
Cars, Computer applications 165-6w
Commuters, Southend-on-Sea 166w
Cycling 206-7w
Drinking & driving, Alcoholism 355w
Drinking & driving, Publicity 157w
Exhaust emission controls 160-1w
Iwade bypass, Road construction 207w
Kingsferry bridge, Road traffic 427
Lorries, Axle weights 157-8w
Lorries, Motor vehicle safety 406w
Lorries, Road accidents 407w, 409w, 417
Lorries, Speed limits 407w
Lorries, Sugar beet 157w
M1, Road traffic 417-9
M1, Road traffic control 158w
M1, Road works 418
M11, Road construction 426
M20, Road construction 207-8w
M25, Motorways 162-3w
M25, Road traffic control 166w
M40, Road construction 165w
M66, Road construction 354-5w, 425-6
Motor vehicle registration, Standards specifications 356w
Motorcycles, Road accidents 164w

Bottomley, Mr Peter—continued
Motorways, Road traffic 418-9
Motorways, Speed limits 156w
Parking, Pedestrian areas 408w
Perry Oaks sludge works 249w
Ports, Roads 165w
Road accidents, Casualties 156-7w
Road accidents, Costs 164w
Road accidents, Death 249w
Road accidents, Drinking & driving 354w
Road construction, Environment 164w
Road construction, North West region 425
Road construction, Road mileage 166w
Road safety, Publicity 161w
Road traffic, Inner London boroughs 153-4w
Road traffic control 166w
Road traffic control, Greater London 165w
Road traffic control, South East region 158w
Road traffic offences, Law reform 355w
Road works 154w
Roads, Deer 160w
Roads, Greater London 153w
Roads, Wandsworth 162w
Roads, West Midlands 158-9w
Severn bridge, Road tolls 167-8w
Severn bridge, South Glamorgan 209w
Speed limits, Rural areas 163w
Transport, Greater London 52-3w
Transport of hazardous materials 249w
Transport of hazardous materials, A41 208w
Tyre tread depths 417
Vehicle Inspectorate 211-2w

***Bottomley, Mrs Virginia**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment*
Questions
Acid rain, Nottingham 203w
Air pollution control 201w
Air pollution control, Dept of the Environment 281w
Air pollution control, Private sector 200-1w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 421-2w
Carbon monoxide, Air pollution 277w
Carbon monoxide, Nottingham 131w, 421w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Air pollution control 277w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Domestic appliances 420w
Chlorofluorocarbons, EC countries 276-7w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Electronics industry 420w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Food packaging 419w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Research 419-20w
Councillors' interests, Shareholders 127w
County Hall, Property transfer 422w
Dog registration scheme, Local authority powers 362w
EC Environment Council 199-200w
EC Environment Council, Nature conservation 202w
Energy research, Air pollution control 275w
Environment protection, International cooperation 281w
European Charter of Local Self-Government 274w
Exhaust emissions 276w
Government grants to local authorities, Camden Borough Council 64w
Hazardous wastes, Imports 4-5w
Industrial wastes, Pollution control 421w
Lead free petrol 126w
Local government finance, Rent increases 199w
Local government staff, Manpower 420w
London Fire & Civil Defence Authority, Emergency planning 63-4w
Methane, Air pollution 276w
National Tree Week, Government assistance 360w
Nature Conservancy Council, Finance 281-2w, 363w, 423-4w

Bottomley, Mrs Virginia—continued
Nature conservation, EC action 275w, 281w, 422w
Nature conservation, EC trade 362w
Nature conservation, Voluntary work 424w
Nitrogen oxides, Air pollution control 278-9w
Non-domestic rates, Local government revenue 63w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Environment 279w
Ozone layer, Science & technology research 280w
Property development, Chelmsford 361-2w
Public sector housing, Housing finance 130w
Radiation Incident Monitoring Network 203w
Radiation Incident Monitoring Network, Manchester 203w
Radioactive waste disposal 279w
Radioactive waste disposal, Radioactive wastes 280w
Radioactive waste disposal, Seas & oceans 279w
Radioactive wastes, Costs 279w
Rate support grants, Revenue support grant 63w
Sites of special scientific interest, Agriculture 135w
Stray dogs, Local authority powers 362w
Tidy Britain Group 64-5w
Transport of hazardous materials 201w
Transport of hazardous materials, Export controls 201w
Transport of hazardous materials, Import controls 201-2w
Waste disposal, Law reform 4w, 360w
Waste disposal, Privatisation 62w
"Way Forward, Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive 202w
Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, Rights of way 421w

Boundary Commission for Scotland
183w

Bovine somatotropin
861
Agricultural research 325w
Health hazards 861-2
Informative labelling 862
Licensing 97w
Medicines Act 1968 862
Milk 861

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
97-8w, 324-5w, 863-4
Compensation 324w
Disease control 241w
Food contamination 98w, 862-3
Food imports 862-3
Scotland 118w
South West region 863

Bowden, Mr Andrew
Questions
USSR, Samoilovich, George 303w

Bowden, Mr Gerald
Questions
Channel tunnel, Dulwich 155w
Extradition, Crown Prosecution Service 869

Bowis, Mr John
Questions
Iraq, Chemical weapons 688
Israel 294w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 236-7w
Road traffic, Inner London boroughs 153-4w

Boyes, Mr Roland
Questions
NATO Nuclear Planning Group 219w
Trident, Arms control negotiations 560

Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 480-4

BR
see British Rail

Bradford
City technology colleges 77w, 354w
Dept of Social Security local offices 91w
School leaving 113w
Unemployment 112w
"Young People's Guide to Social Security" 390-1w

Bradford Resource Centre
Training 111-2w

Bradley, Mr Keith
Questions
Ambulance services, Manchester 193w
Royal Ordnance, Intellectual property 223w

Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 778-82, 784, 788
Questions
Business statements 230

Brandon-Bravo, Mr Martin M
Questions
Ground water, Water pollution 424w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 779
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 346, 349, 401
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 209
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 544
Questions
Afghanistan, USSR 295w
Chemical weapons, USSR 217w
Motor vehicle registration, Standards specifications 356w
Nuclear weapons, Conventional weapons 562

Breast cancer
Computer applications 59w
Scotland 41w
Scottish health boards 40-1w
Screening 40-1w, 151-2w

Breathalysers
399-400w

BREL
see British Rail Engineering

Brewing industry
Codes of practice 868
Tenancy agreements 868

Bridge Street area
(02:12:88) 966-1018

Bridging allowances
113w
Ayrshire 413w

Bright, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 99
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 266-8
Questions
EC Budget Council 48-9w

Bright, Keith
Redundancy pay 162w, 355w

British Aerospace
185w, 563
Defence contracts 564-5

British Approvals Board for Telecommunications
Telephone charges 9w

British citizenship
245w
Administrative delays 244-5w

British Council
Arts finance 330-2w

British dependent territories
Immigration rules 243w

British embassies
India 304w
Ministers' visits abroad 49w
Visas 308-10w

British Nuclear Fuels
126w

British Nuclear Fuels Ltd
see British Nuclear Fuels

British Rail
7-8w, 53w, 154w, 156w, 158-9w, 354w, 420-1
Investment 160w
Pension funds (24:11:88) 329-34
Privatisation 427

British Rail Engineering
Privatisation 157w

British Steel Corporation
Profit sharing 170w

British Tourist Authority
369w

British Transport [illegible]ce
427
London Underground 408w

British Veterinary Association
319w

British Wool Marketing Board
317-8w

Brittan, Leon
343w

Brixton Prison
172w

Broadcasting controls
Television 72-3w

"Broadcasting in the 90s White Paper"
73-4w

Broadmoor Hospital
173w

Bromley
Special education 352-3w

Brooke, Rt Hon Peter, Paymaster General
Questions
Civil servants 412w
Civil service dispersal 412w
EC Budget Council 48-9w
EC grants & loans 269-71w
Intelligence services, Public service pensions 271w
UK contributions to EC budget 1-2w
UK repayments from EC budget, Fontainebleau Summit 356-7w

Brown, Gordon
(01:12:88) 897-9

Brown, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 579-89

Brown, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 99-100
Questions
Hooliganism, Football 410w

Brown, Mr Nicholas
Questions
Frigates, Defence contracts 214-5w

Brown, Mr Ron
Questions
NATO 220w
Prison sentences 417-8w

Browne, Mr John
Questions
Gurkhas, Nepal 415-6w

Bruce, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 784, 799
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 89
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 257, 282, 283-6
Questions
Business statements 233
Caribbean, Drug abuse 289w
Coastal protection, Expenditure 205w
Common sheep meat regime 95w
Defence land, Property transfer 570
Employment Act 1988, Commencement orders 435w
Fisheries, Marine animals 860
Navy, NATO 233w
Nuclear weapons, Modernisation 565
Official engagements 178w, 344w

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Petroleum Royalties (Relief) & Continental Shelf Bill, 2R (30:11:88) 746-50
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 471-5
Questions
Aerosols, Labelling 405-6w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Electronics industry 420w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Food packaging 419w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Import controls 405w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Research 419-20w
Green pound 326w

BSC
see British Steel Corporation

BTA
see British Tourist Authority

Buchan, Mr Norman
Questions
Business statements 890
Explosives, Royal Ordnance 220-1w

Buck, Sir Antony
Debates etc.
British Rail, Pension funds (24:11:88) 331
Structure plans, Cambridgeshire (28:11:88) 558
Questions
Trident, Defence expenditure 560

Buckley, Mr George J
Questions
EC Environment Council, Nature conservation 202w
El Salvador, Human rights 295w
Nature conservation, Azores 283w
Trident, Defence expenditure 222w

Building repairs
Cathedrals 67w, 428

Building sites
Health & Safety Executive 434w

Burns, Mr Simon
Questions
Property development, Chelmsford 361-2w
Residential care, Handicapped 141w

Bus services
Concessionary fares 406w
Greater London 158w

Buses
Greater London 420
Road damage 420

Buses—continued
Road tax 420

Bush, George
34w, 108w

Business expansion scheme
Private rented housing 271w

Business questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (24:11:88) 232-4, (01:12:88) 889

Business statements
227-38, 885-96

***Butcher, Mr John**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Education and Science*
Questions
Nursery schools 83-6w
Special education, Bromley 352-3w

Butler, Mr Chris
Questions
Warrington & Runcorn Development Corporation 202w
Western European Union 226w
Work permits 370w

Butter
EC external trade 239w
New Zealand 100w, (30:11:88) 825-45

Butterfill, Mr John
Questions
Bypasses, Road construction 158w
Rates & rating 363w
UK repayments from EC budget, Fontainebleau Summit 356-7w

BWMB
see British Wool Marketing Board

By election writs
Epping Forest (23:11:88) 111-4

Bye laws
Water supply industry 134w

Bypasses
Road construction 158w

Caborn, Mr Richard
Questions
Conventional weapons, Military balance 216w

Calderdale Health Authority
Health service staff 380w
Hospital beds 380w
Nurses 379w

Caledonian MacBrayne
(30:11:88) 732
Ministerial statements (30:11:88) 705-19

Calero, Adolfo
306w

Callaghan, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 199-201

Calling of Members
Speaker's rulings & statements (22:11:88) 101, (23:11:88) 179, (29:11:88) 577, 578, (30:11:88) 712, (01:12:88) 900

CalMac
see Caledonian MacBrayne

Cambridgeshire
Structure plans (28:11:88) 555-8

Camden Borough Council
Government grants to local authorities 64w

Camdessus, Michael
272w

Cameras
Speed limits 407w

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
220w

Campbell, Mr Menzies
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 405
Questions
Middle East, USA 301w
Nuclear weapons, Modernisation 565
Nurses, Industrial disputes 360

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Tanks 226w

Campbell, Sharon
259w

Campbell-Savours, Mr D N
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (01:12:88) 896
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 782-7
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 25
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 593
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 123
Royal family, State visits (23:11:88) 117, 118
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 716
Questions
Business statements 236-7, 895-6
Defence industries, Northern region 569
UN General Assembly 689

Canada
Ministers' visits abroad 303-4w

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Questions
Business statements 234-5
Minimum wage, Prosecutions 429-30w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, Takeovers 251w
Trident 222w

Cancer
Children 260w
Humberside 260w
Private health services 152w
Screening 59w

Cancer hazards
Asbestos (25:11:88) 407-14

Candidates
Terrorism (24:11:88) 238

Capital gains tax
187w
Pensioners 104-5w

Carbon dioxide
Air pollution control 421-2w

Carbon monoxide
276w
Air pollution 277w
Nottingham 131w, 421w

"Care in the Community"
60w

Career structure
Army 350w
Midwives 370-80w
Nurses 59w, 146-8w, 192w, 242-4w, 260w, 340-2w, 348w, 358-60, 370-80w, 417-8w, 440-1w

Caribbean
Drug abuse 289w
Foreign policy 184w

Caribbean—continued
Health services 302w
Smuggling 691-2

"Caring for Children"
383w

Carlile, Mr Alex
Questions
Poland, Foreign policy 302-3w

Carlisle
Dept of Social Security local offices 387w

Carlisle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 464, 466
Questions
South Africa, Economic sanctions 293w

Carlisle Committee
see Parole Review Committee

Carrington, Mr Matthew
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 643-5

Cars
Cellular phones 247w
Computer applications 165-6w
West Germany 170w

Cartwright, Mr John
Questions
Community charge, London boroughs 422-3w
County Hall, Property transfer 422w
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, Offices 350w
Educational administration, Inner London boroughs 402-3w
Educational finance, Inner London boroughs 403w
Woolwich Arsenal, Property development 350w

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
Business questions point of order (01:12:88) 895-6
Members' conduct (01:12:88) 900-1
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 805, 817, 818-9, 823
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 600
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 546-7
Questions
Jury vetting 176w
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 880

Casualties
Road accidents 156-7w

Category A prisoners
74w

Cathedrals
Building repairs 67w, 428w
Church property 430-1
Costs 428
Government assistance 576
Repairs & maintenance 428

CBI
see Confederation of British Industry

CEGB
see Central Electricity Generating Board

Celecia, Douglas
186w

Cellular phones
Cars 247w
Prosecutions 247w

Cemeteries
War casualties 51-2w, 203-4w

Central America
Heads of state 298w
USA 306w

Central Electricity Generating Board
283-4w, 287w

Central London Rail Study
159w

Central Policy Review Staff
Costs 345-6w

Cereals
Agricultural production 56-7w, 323w
Agricultural surpluses 858-9
Animal feed 204w
Food consumption 55w
Intervention prices 54-5w
Intervention stocks 55-6w

Certification
Merchant seamen 355-6w

Cervical cancer
Screening 142w

Chalker, Rt Hon Lynda, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Questions
Africa, International cooperation 296w
Africa, Ministers' visits abroad 304w
Angola, Armed forces deployment 696
Angola, Cuba 296-7w
Angola, Peace negotiations 296-7w
Angola, UNITA 288w
Council of Ministers 291w, 331-3w
Cyprus 298w
Departmental correspondence, Administrative delays 333w
EC internal trade 305w, 307w
EC social policy 288w
European Convention on Human Rights, Complaints 290-2w
European Free Trade Association, EC external relations 307w
France 295w
Front line states, Ministers' visits abroad 293w
Gibraltar 289w
Gibraltar, Homosexuality 185w
Italy 294w
Kurdistan, Refugees 299w
Namibia, Peace negotiations 288w
Nature conservation, Azores 283w
Single European Act 304w
Somalia, Chemical weapons 109w
South Africa 701-2
South Africa, Arms exports 185w
South Africa, Economic sanctions 293w
South Africa, Ministers' visits abroad 702
Southern Africa 293w
Southern Africa, Ministers' visits abroad 293w
Southern Africa, Peace negotiations 697
Turkey, Human rights 301w
Zimbabwe, Harrington, Odile 109w

Challenger tanks
51w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel tunnel
Dulwich 155w
East Midlands 206-7w
Economic regions 155w
Kent (02:12:88) 1019-32
North East region 155w
North West region 155w, 423-4
Private sector 53w
Railway network 53w, 407-8w, 423, (02:12:88) 1019-32
Railway stations 155-6w
Railway transport 156w
Railway travel 207w
Scotland 424
Transport 155w
Wales 418w

Channon, Rt Hon Paul, Secretary of State for Transport
Questions
A38, Saltash bypass 423
A69, Road works 425

Channon, Rt Hon Paul—continued
London Regional Transport 415
London Regional Transport, Finance 426
London Regional Transport, Safety standards 416-7
Ports 154w
Public transport, Greater London 415-6, 426
Road construction, Cycling 424-5
Road construction, Expenditure 153w
Road construction, North East region 424
Road construction, Planning 425
Road traffic, Greater London 416
Roads, Greater London 153w
Severn bridge, Construction 167w
Transport, Greater London 415

Chapman, Mr Sydney
Questions
Agricultural land 328-9w
Agricultural land, Planning permission 206w, 329w
Defence land, Land acquisition 229-30w
European Security Conference 702-3
London Underground, Railway safety 159w
Ministry of Defence, Competition 349-50w
National Tree Week, Government assistance 360w
Nature conservation, EC action 281w
Nurses, Industrial disputes 363

Charities
Management 2w
Private education 358w

Charity Commission
2w

Chelmsford
Property development 361-2w

Chemical weapons
Iraq 301-2w, 687-9
Somalia 109w
USSR 217w, 265w

Chemicals
Paper industry 96w

Chernyak, Dima
308w

Chernyak, Uri
308w

Child benefit
Children in care 413w

Child health
Leukaemia 255w

Child minding
150-1w

Child support
94-6w

Children
Cancer 260w

Children in care
Child benefit 413w

Children's rights
United Nations 185w

Chile
288w
Democracy 693
Elections 693
Human rights 692-3
Montes, Jorge 296w
Political prisoners 289w

China
Human rights 108-9w

Chiropody
Home care services 259w
Nottingham Health Authority 187-8w

Chlorofluorocarbons
199-200w, 405-6w, 574-5
Air pollution control 5-6w, 277w, 419-20w

Chlorofluorocarbons—continued
Domestic appliances 420w
EC countries 276-7w
Electronics industry 420w
Food packaging 419w
Import controls 405w
Research 419-20w

***Chope, Mr Christopher**, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment*
Debates etc.
Local government services, Management (02:12:88) 1037-40
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 1011-8
Structure plans, Cambridgeshire (28:11:88) 557-8
Questions
Agricultural land, Planning permission 206w
Dept of Health & Social Security, Richmond House 132w
Government departments, Electric lighting 281w
House of Commons chamber, Lighting 126-7w, 360w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 278w
Planning appeals, Nottingham 198-9w
Planning permission, Property development 277-8w
Planning permission, Town & Country Planning General Development Order 1977 133w
War casualties, Cemeteries 203-4w

Church buildings
Inner city areas 429

Church Commissioners
67w

Church property
Cathedrals 430-1

Church services
Wakefield Prison 74w

Churchill, Mr Winston
Questions
Bovine somatotropin, Informative labelling 862
Royal Ordnance, Defence contracts 563-4

City of Glasgow District Council Order Confirmation Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
1R (01:12:88) 857

City of London (Spitalfields Market) Bill 1987/88
Debates etc.
Order for consideration of motion read (29:11:88) 559
Motion to proceed in present Session (01:12:88) 929-34

City of Westminster
Demonstrations 75-6w, 397w

City technology colleges
Bradford 77w, 354w
Curriculum 14-5w
Educational finance 15w
Haberdashers Askes School 403-4w
Nottingham 76w
School admission 14w
Sylvan High School Croydon 402w

Civil defence
Industry 406w
Nuclear weapons 38w
War casualties 37w

Civil disorder
Algeria 308w

Civil liability
Nuclear accidents 286w

Civil servants
412w

Civil servants' visits abroad
Expenditure 10w

Civil service agencies
Defence research establishments 265w
Meteorological Office 265w

Civil service dispersal
412w
Patent Office 169w

Civil service manpower
Design 44w
Factory Inspectorate 433w
Immigration & Nationality Division 75w
Marine Directorate 53w
Nuclear Installations Inspectorate 430w
Oil industry safety 47w
Overseas aid 258w
Passport Office 72w, 173-4w, 410w
Student Unions Review 353-4w
Tax evasion 105-6w

Civil service recruitment
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 302w

***Clark, Mr Alan**, Minister of State for Trade and Industry*
Questions
EC grants & loans 171w
EC internal trade, Publicity 251w
Foreign investment in UK 251w
Government assistance to industry, West Germany 103w
Manufactured goods, Balance of trade 250-1w, 253w
Manufactured goods, UK trade with EC 251w
Overseas trade, Iraq 103w

Clark, Dr David
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 828-30
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 808-10
Questions
Agricultural surpluses, EC action 858
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 324-5w, 864
Butter, EC external trade 239w
Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 99w
Dairy products, EC external trade 100w
Insecticides, Drugs 205w
Nature Conservancy Council, Research 99w
Nuclear accidents, Compensation 99-100w
Nuclear accidents, Pollution monitoring 100w
Pesticide residues, Salmon 99w
Pesticides, Agricultural research 99w
Radioactivity, Cumbria 329-30w
Sites of special scientific interest, Agriculture 135w

Clark, Dr Michael
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 520
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 136, 151

Clark, Sir William
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 615-8

***Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth**, Secretary of State for Health*
Questions
AIDS, Screening 437-8w
Dept of Health, Adelphi Building 144w
Dept of Health, Office 144-5w
Hospitals, Ministers' domestic visits 192w
Nurses, Career structure 146-8w, 260w, 370-80w, 440-1w

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth—continued
Nurses, Industrial disputes 192w, 358-65

Clarke, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 510
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 543
Questions
Cuba, Foreign policy 306w

Class sizes
Local education authorities 17-9w

Clay, Trevor
Public appointments 346w

Clean Air Act 1956
Questions
Regional health authorities 191w

Clelland, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 496-9
Questions
A69, Road works 425
Bovine somatotropin, Agricultural research 325w

Climate
Air pollution 247-8w

Clothing industry
Youth training scheme 272-3w

Clwyd.
Unemployment 47-8w

Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 251
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 501-3
Questions
Iraq, Chemical weapons 688
Kurdistan, Iraq 299w
Military aircraft, USA 213w
Water supply disconnections 280w

CND
see Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Coal mining
Subsidence 341w

Coastal protection
Expenditure 205w
Seas & oceans 327w

Coates, Alan
Police discipline 36w

COD Donnington
Trade unions 221w

Codes of practice
Brewing industry 868
Cook-chill catering 145w
Estate agents 365w

Codling, Errol
Illegal immigrants 398w

Cohen, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Private Members' motions (30:11:88) 731
Questions
Business statements 892
Defence equipment, Electronic equipment 231w
Fish, Tributyl tin 326w
International Monetary Fund 272w
Iran, Political prisoners 701
Kurdistan 299w
London Underground 159w
Members' facilities, Facsimile transmission 434-5
Privatisation, Costs 343w
Royal Ordnance 430

Colvin, Mr Michael
Questions
Air traffic control 161w
Armed forces pensions, Widows' benefits 227w

Colvin, Mr Michael—continued
Brewing industry, Tenancy agreements 868
Gibraltar 289w
Planning permission, Departmental publications 319w
Territorial Army, Army strength 231-2w

Commencement orders
72w
Employment Act 1988 435w

Commercial Hydraulics Liverpool
104w

Commission of the European Communities
see European Commission

Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members
Public appointments 12w

Committee on Enforcement Powers of the Revenue Departments
see Inland Revenue Review of Enforcement Powers Committee

Committee on Safety of Medicines
Drug side effects 148-9w
Finance 147-8w
Manpower 149w
Public appointments 149-50w

Common agricultural policy
Agricultural surpluses 857-8
Common sheep meat regime 866
EC action 865-6
EC budget 321w
EC reform 320w
Eggs 866-7
Expenditure 319-20w
Sheep meat 866

Common organisation of markets
(30:11:88) 804-24

Common sheep meat regime
95w, 240w, 323w
Common agricultural policy 866
EC Agriculture Council 864-5

Community care
381w
Hospital discharges 61w
Social Fund 93-4w

Community Care Review
60w

Community charge
363w
Farmers 867
London boroughs 422-3w
Scotland 255-6w, 339w
Students 339w

Community health councils
Air pollution control 191w

Community nurses
Mental health services 190w

Community physicians
Hospital consultants 188w

Community policing
Strangford 351w

Community trusts
133w
Government grants to local authorities 133w

Commuters
Southend-on-Sea 166w

Companies Act 1985
Questions
102w

Companies House
see Companies Registration Office (England & Wales)

Companies' political contributions
Economic League 102w

Companies Registration Office (England & Wales)
405w

Compensation
Armed forces casualties 225w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 324w
Dalkon shield 439w
Farmers 99-100w
Nuclear accidents 99-100w

Competition
Ministry of Defence 349-50w

Complaints
Doctors 388w
European Convention on Human Rights 290-2w

Comptroller & Auditor General for Northern Ireland
see Northern Ireland Audit Office

Computer applications
Breast cancer 59w
Cars 165-6w
Shares 366w

Computer privacy
Defence 566
Ministry of Defence 230w

Computers in Government departments
Passport Office 174w

Concessionary fares
Bus services 406w

Confederation of British Industry
286w
Equal pay 273w

Conference on Security & Cooperation in Europe
see European Security Conference

Conferences
Public order policing 397w

Conservative Party
Trade unions 397w

Construction
Power stations 287w
Severn bridge 167w
VAT 267-8w

Consumer credit
Interest rates 412w

Consumers
NHS 183w

Continental shelf
(23:11:88) 120, (30:11:88) 733-62

Contraceptives
Expenditure 188w
Health warnings 138-9w
Medical records 138-9w

Contracts
NHS & private practice 152w

Contracts for services
Scottish health boards 334-5w

Contracts of employment
Scottish health boards 334w

Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986
Questions
99w

Control of Pollution Act 1974
Questions
4w

Conventional weapons
Arms control negotiations 231w
Military balance 216w, 229w
Nuclear weapons 562

Convictions
Drinking & driving 400w

Conway, Mr Derek
Questions
Armed forces reserves 228w

Cook, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (29:11:88) 578
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 60, 75-83, 84
Questions
Helicopters, Argentina 224w

Cook, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 243, 251-9
Questions
Clay, Trevor, Public appointments 346w
Hospitals, Ministers' domestic visits 192w
NHS & private practice, Contracts 152w
NHS finance, Expenditure 193w
Nurses, Industrial disputes 192w, 358-60
One parent families, Social security benefits 262-3w
Road traffic offences, Law reform 355w
Stone Hospital, Property transfer 260w

Cook-chill catering
Codes of practice 145w
Departmental publications 382w
Laboratories 145w, 381w
Listeria monocytogenes 145-6w, 382w
Public Health Laboratory Service 382w

Coombs, Mr Anthony
Questions
EC grants & loans 171w
Local employer network scheme 272w
Roads, West Midlands 158-9w
Theatre nuclear weapons, West Germany 230-1w

Coombs, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 825, 837-8

Cope, Rt Hon John, Minister of State for Employment
Questions
Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members, Public appointments 12w
Employment Act 1988, Commencement orders 435w
Local employer network scheme 272w
School leaving, Bradford 113w
Unemployment, Statistics 272w
Vocational guidance, School leaving 112w
Youth training scheme 369w
Youth training scheme, Clothing industry 272-3w
Youth training scheme, Handicapped 370w
Youth training scheme, South Yorkshire 369w
Youth training scheme, Take-up 369w

Corbett, Mr Robin
Questions
Nature conservation, EC trade 362w
Prisoners' rights, Electronic equipment 35w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 337, 343, 388-91
Questions
Bombings, Guildford 36w
Cellular phones, Cars 247w
Central London Rail Study 159w
Educational finance, Inner London boroughs 19-20w
Electric lighting, Energy conservation 286w
Electric lighting, Retail trade 367w
Government departments, Electric lighting 281w
Iran, Political prisoners 315w
Kurdistan, Human rights 66w
NATO 220w
Nurses, Industrial disputes 363
Overseas trade, Iraq 103w
Police discipline, Coates, Alan 36w
Refugees, EC action 35-6w
Transport, Greater London 52-3w
Turkey, Overseas aid 14w
Visas, EC action 36-7w

Co-responsibility levy
Agricultural surpluses 858

Cormack, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 976-81

Cormack, Mr Patrick—continued
Questions
Hereford Cathedral, Mappa mundi 428
Palestine Liberation Organisation, UN General Assembly 695

Cornea, Doina
Romania 334w

Cornwall
Fisheries 321w

Cost effectiveness
Defence procurement 217w, 264w

Cost per pupil
Local education authorities 17w

Couchman, Mr James
Questions
Southern Africa, Ministers' visits abroad 293w

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
351w

Council house rents
Wales 242w

Council house sales
Nottingham 131w

Council housing
Public petitions (30:11:88) 846
Torbay Borough Council (30:11:88) 846

Council housing finance
Repairs & maintenance 199w

Council of Ministers
100w, 291w, 331-3w

Councillors' interests
Shareholders 127w

Country Landowners' Association
Set-aside schemes 323w

Countryside Commission
319w
Finance 423-4w

County Hall
Property transfer 422w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Questions
Merchant ships 215w

Coventry
Restart programme 368w
Unemployment benefits 387w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Cyprus 298w
Holloway Prison, Sanitation 173w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 268w
London Underground, Railway safety 408-9w
Look After Your Heart, District health authorities 435-6w
Prison staff, Public sector housing sales 172w
Prison staff, Tied housing 172w, 393w
Prison visits, Married people 172-3w
Prisoners' transfers, Mentally disturbed offenders 173w
Prisons, Sanitation 243w
Roads, Wandsworth 162w
Scottish health boards, Contracts for services 334-5w
Set-aside schemes, Take-up 318w
Vietnamese refugees, Hong Kong 331w
Women's prisons, Day nurseries 243-4w

Cox Committee
see HIV infection & AIDS Working Group

CPRS
see Central Policy Review Staff

Cran, Mr James
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 509-11
Questions
Cancer, Humberside 260w

Cran, Mr James—continued
Gulf states, Ministers' visits abroad 299w
Lorries, Motor vehicle safety 406w
Motor vehicle safety 170w
Motor vehicles, USA 169w
Patent Office, Civil Service dispersal 169w
Tanks 226w

Cremation
Animals 57w
Energy consumption 47w
War casualties 47w

Criminal damage
Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast 236w

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
394w
Administrative delays 393w
Manpower 394w

Criminal Justice Act 1988
Questions
176w
Sentencing 72w

Crown immunity
Air pollution control 178w, 235w, 240w, 242w, 246w, 250w, 253w, 255w, 259w, 266w, 273-4w, 281w, 286w, 313w, 342-3w, 358w

Crown Prosecution Service
Extradition 869

Crowther, Mr Stan
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 274-7, 325

Cruelty to children
Social workers' training 6-7w

Cruise missiles
Nuclear disarmament 219w

Cryer, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 239
Business questions intervention (24:11:88) 231
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (30:11:88) 723
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 776, 779-80
Public petitions, Members' conduct (29:11:88) 676
Public petitions, Settle-Carlisle railway (30:11:88) 845
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 242, 245
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 538
Questions
Business statements 236
Offenders, Electronic surveillance 398w, 410-1w

CSCE
see European Security Conference

CSM
see Committee on Safety of Medicines

Cuba
Angola 296-7w
Foreign policy 306w

Cultural relations
Treaties 106-7w
USSR 106w, 305w

Cumbria
Radioactivity 100w, 329-30w
Unemployment 113-4w

Cunningham, Dr John
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 438-47, 449, 450, 453
Questions
European Charter of Local Self-Government, Local authorities 10w
Local Government Finance Act 1988, Rates & rating 282w

Cunningham, Dr John—continued
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 128w
Opencast mining, Planning permission 137-8w
Sewage, Waste disposal 127w
Water authorities, Public appointments 128-30w

Curriculum
City technology colleges 14-5w

Currie, Mrs Edwina, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health
Debates etc.
Physiology, Technicians (22:11:88) 105, 106-10
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 100
Questions
Accident & emergency departments, Death 262w
Adoption, Local government social services 382-3w
Ambulance services, Manchester 193w
Birmingham, Ministers' domestic visits 58w
Blood Products Laboratory, Factor VIII 440w
Cancer, Humberside 260w
Cancer, Private health services 152w
Cancer, Screening 59w
Cervical cancer, Screening 142w
Child minding 150-1w
Chiropody, Home care services 259w
Chiropody, Nottingham Health Authority 187-8w
Community care, Hospital discharges 61w
Contraceptives, Expenditure 188w
Contraceptives, Health warnings 138-9w
Contraceptives, Medical records 138-9w
Cook-chill catering, Codes of practice 145w
Cook-chill catering, Departmental publications 382w
Cook-chill catering, Laboratories 145w, 381w
Cook-chill catering, Listeria monocytogenes 145-6w, 382w
Cook-chill catering, Public Health Laboratory Service 382w
Dalkon shield, Compensation 439w
Day nurseries 150w, 152w
District health authorities, Air pollution 190-1w
Eggs, Food poisoning 146w
Elderly, Death 439-40w
Elderly, NHS & private practice 57-8w
Elderly, Population 189w
Electorate, Local government constituencies 189-90w
Geriatric patients, Medical treatments 385-6w
Geriatric patients, Newcastle Health Authority 58-9w
Hearing aids 193-5w
Hearing aids, Administrative delays 193w
Hearing aids, Health services 194w
Hearing aids, NHS 194-6w
Hearing aids, Voluntary organisations 195w
Hospital beds 151w
Hospitals, Waste disposal 191-2w
Intermediate treatment, Government grants 58w
Look After Your Heart, District health authorities 435-6w
Mental health community care, Mentally ill 143w
Mental health services 435w
Mental health services, Joint financing 142-3w
Mental health services, Mentally disturbed offenders 143-4w
Mental health services, NHS finance 143w, 436-7w
Mental illness, Government grants 142w
Mental illness, Hospital beds 140-1w
Mental illness, Research finance 143w
Mental illness, Voluntary organisations 142w
Mercury, Fish 198w

***Currie, Mrs Edwina**—continued*
Multiple sclerosis, Alternative medicine 379w
Multiple sclerosis, Diagnosis 440w
Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association, Government grants 260w
NHS, Air pollution 188w
NHS & private practice, Contracts 152w
Old people's homes, Private health services 261-2w
Patients' transport, Helicopters 145w
Play groups 146w
Registration of births deaths & marriages 383-4w
Residential care, Handicapped 141w
Rutland Memorial Hospital, Maternity services 437w
Schizophrenia, Expenditure 140w
Schizophrenia, Medical research 139-40w
Schizophrenia, Mental health community care 140w
Schizophrenia, Mental patients 139w
Sharon Campbell Care & Aftercare Inquiry 259w
Stone Hospital, Property transfer [illegible]0w
War casualties, Environmental health 61w

Curry, Mr David
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 834-6
Settle-Carlisle railway, Public petitions (28:11:88) 554

Customs Duties (ECSC) (Amendment No 3) Order 1988
Debates etc.
(30:11:88) 732

Cycling
206-7w
Road construction 424-5

Cyprus
298w

Dairy products
EC external trade 100w

Dalkon shield
138-9w
Compensation 439w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
By election writs, Epping Forest (23:11:88) 111-2
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 764, 765
Official Report (30:11:88) 726
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 967-71, 976, 980-4, 1014-6
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 22
Questions
Antarctic, Tourism 333w
Antarctic Treaty, Voting methods 333w
British Transport Police 427
Business statements 894-5
European Commission, Public appointments 343w
Falkland Islands, Argentina 307w
Food packaging, Health hazards 96w
Ministerial changes 178w
Palace of Westminster, Press releases 431
Westland Helicopters, Defence procurement 232w

Darling, Mr Alistair
Debates etc.
Summertime, EC action (01:12:88) 948-52, 954, 955-6
Questions
Agricultural research, Research finance 322w
British citizenship 245w
British citizenship, Administrative delays 244-5w
Defence, Computer privacy 566
Immigration & Nationality Division, Civil service manpower 75w
Immigration applications 311-4w

***Darling, Mr Alistair**—continued*
Old people's homes, Private health services 261-2w
Political refugees, Immigration rules 245-6w
Sheltered housing, Service charges 282-3w
Temporary immigrants, Immigration controls 246w
Visas, British embassies 308-10w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 455-9

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 580, 637-8
Questions
Palestine Liberation Organisation 298w

Davies, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 843-4
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 818-21, 824
Questions
Bovine somatotropin, Medicines Act 1968 862
Planning appeals, National parks 417w
Planning appeals, Wales 416-8w
Trident missiles, Arms control negotiations 562

Davis, Mr David
Questions
Gulf states, Foreign policy 298w
Set-aside schemes 318w

Day, Mr Stephen
Questions
Women's Farmers' Union 327w

Day care of children
Women's employment 383w

Day nurseries
150w, 152w
Women's prisons 243-4w

Death
Accident & emergency departments 262w
Elderly 439-40w
Road accidents 249w

Death grants
90w

Deer
Roads 160w

Defence
Computer privacy 566
Egypt 264w
France 215w
Kuwait 223w
Queen's Speech (25:11:88) 335-406
Saudi Arabia 227-8w
USA 34w, 227w
West Germany 231w, 266w

Defence contracts
British Aerospace 564-5
Devonport dockyard 230w
Frigates 214-5w
North West region 233w
Royal Ordnance 563-4
Tanks 104w
Trident submarines 222w

Defence equipment
50w
Electronic equipment 231w
Lasers 51w
VAT 359w

Defence expenditure
217-8w, 221w, 228w
Trident 222w, 559-60

Defence industries
Northern region 569

Defence land
Land acquisition 229-30w
Land values 213w

***Defence land**—continued*
Nottingham 349w
Property transfer 570
Sherwood forest 234w

Defence procurement
Cost effectiveness 217w, 264w
Royal Ordnance 228w, 563
Tanks 414w, 564
USSR 265w
Wales 568-9
Westland Helicopters 232w

Defence Quality Assurance Directorate
Offices 350w

Defence research
Nuclear weapons 51w
Privatisation 50-1w

Defence research establishments
Civil service agencies 265w

Defence Statistical Organisation
Privatisation 51w

Democracy
Chile 693

Demonstrations
City of Westminster 75-6w, 397w
South Africa House 701-2
Student loans 174-6w
Students 75-6w, 397w

Dental services
259w

Dept of Education & Science
Air pollution control 235w

Dept of Employment
Air pollution control 273-4w

Dept of Energy
125w, 285-6w
Air pollution control 286w

Dept of Health
Adelphi Building 144w
Civil service dispersal 144w
Offices 144-5w

Dept of Health & Social Security
144-5w
Richmond House 132w

Dept of Social Security
93-4w

Dept of Social Security local offices
Blackpool 263w
Bradford 91w
Carlisle 387w
North West region 263w
Nottingham 181w

Dept of the Environment
Air pollution control 281w

Dept of Trade & Industry
Air pollution control 253w

Dept of Transport
Air pollution control 250w

Departmental correspondence
Administrative delays 333w
Social Fund 93-4w
Vacancies 113w

Departmental leaflets
Social security benefits 390-1w

Departmental publications
Cook-chill catering 382w
Planning permission 319w

DES
see Dept of Education & Science

Design
67-8w
Civil service manpower 44w
Finance 44-5w

Design—continued
Invisible exports 44w

Design initiative
44-5w

Developing countries
EC aid 69w

Development aid
257-8w
National income 68-9w

Development Assistance Committee
70w

Devlin, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 307-11
Questions
Farmers, Northern region 867
Ministry of Defence, Woolwich 414w
Road construction, North East region 424

Devon
Fisheries 321w

Devonport dockyard
Defence contracts 230w

Dewar, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 706-7

DHSS
see Dept of Health & Social Security

Diagnosis
Multiple sclerosis 440w

Diamond, Rt Hon Lord
Newspaper press 401w

Dickens, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 582, 587
Questions
United Nations, Children's rights 185w

Dieldrin
River pollution 132w

Director General of Electricity Supply
(30:11:88) 731-2

Director General of Water Services
(23:11:88) 119-20

Disaster relief
Nicaragua 13-4w, 692

Disclosure of information
Official secrets (30:11:88) 732

Disease control
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 241w

District councils
282w

District health authorities
Air pollution 190-1w
Look After Your Heart 435-6w

Dixon's
77w

Dobson, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 260-1
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 801-4
Official Report (30:11:88) 729-30
Private notice question intervention (25:11:88) 359
Private notice question point of order (25:11:88) 365
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 581, 633, 657-63
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 352
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 210

Dobson, Mr Frank—continued
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 243, 245
Questions
Breast cancer, Screening 40-1w, 151-2w
Business statements 227-30, 885-6
Cancer, Private health services 152w
Cancer, Screening 59w
Community care, Hospital discharges 61w
Hospital beds 151w
Hospital waiting lists, Publishing 153w
Income support, Residential care 44w

Doctors
Complaints 388w
Handicapped 388-9w
Manpower 151w
Women 387-8w

DOE
see Dept of the Environment

Dog registration scheme
Local authority powers 362w

Dogs
Animal welfare 398-9w
Royal Army Veterinary Corps 222-3w

Domestic appliances
Chlorofluorocarbons 420w

Domestic safety
Multiple occupation 361w

Doran, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Petroleum Royalties (Relief) & Continental Shelf Bill, 2R (30:11:88) 738-43, 759-60, 761
Questions
NATO, Theatre nuclear weapons 218w
Torry research station 325w

Douglas, Mr Dick
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 714
Questions
Business statements 888-9
European fighter aircraft, Radar 567

Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James,
Under-Secretary of State for Scotland
Questions
Air pollution control, Scottish Office 255w
Blood tests, Scottish courts 256w
Legal aid, Industrial tribunals 42w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Dounreay 118w
Prison sentences 417-8w
Road safety barriers, Road accidents 337-8w
Road safety barriers, Scotland 339w
Schizophrenia, Homelessness 117-8w
Schizophrenia, Hospital admissions 118w
Schizophrenia, Mentally disturbed offenders 117-8w

Dounreay
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 118w, 126w

Down
Road accidents 428w

Drinking & driving
Alcoholism 355w
Convictions 400w
Publicity 157w
Road accidents 354w

Drug abuse
Caribbean 289w

Drug side effects
Committee on Safety of Medicines 148-9w

Drugs
Insecticides 205w

DSO
see Defence Statistical Organisation

DTI
see Dept of Trade & Industry

DTp
see Dept of Transport

Duffy, Mr A E P
Questions
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 883-4

Dulwich
Channel tunnel 155w

Dumfries & Galloway
Income support 413w

Dunn, Mr Bob
Questions
Business statements 888

Dunnachie, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Armed forces reserves, Employment 215w
EC Fisheries Council 327w
Further education colleges, Educational finance 340w
Interest rates 268w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 109w
Retirement pensions 392w
Vietnamese refugees, Hong Kong 292w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Questions
Nurses, Industrial disputes 361-2

Dyfed County Council
347-8w

Dykes, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 481
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 249
Questions
European Parliament Members, Palace of Westminster 434
USSR, Human rights 289-90w

Eadie, Mr Alexander
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 711-2

EAEC
see EURATOM

EAGGF
see European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund

Ear nose & throat
Health service staff 195-6w
Hospital waiting lists 196w

Earnings rules
Pensioners 182w
Pensions 413-4w
Retirement pensions 91w

East Anglia University
202w

East coast railway line
Railway electrification 154w

East Midlands
Channel tunnel 206-7w

East West relations
Human rights 702-3

Eastern Europe
Human rights 302w

EC action
Agriculture 326w
Agricultural surpluses 858

EC action—continued
Air traffic control 698
Common agricultural policy 865-6
Extradition 698-9
Fisheries (01:12:88) 902-28
Middle East 700
Nature conservation 275w, 281w, 283w, 422w
Refugees 35-6w
Regional planning & development 46w
Shipping 164-5w
Summertime (01:12:88) 936-58
Transport infrastructure (28:11:88) 531-54
Visas 36-7w

EC Agriculture Council
320w, 865-6
Common sheep meat regime 864-5

EC aid
Developing countries 69w
Environment 258-9w

EC budget
Common agricultural policy 321w
UK contributions 1-2w
UK repayments 356-7w

EC Budget Council
48-9w

EC Commission
see European Commission

EC countries
Chlorofluorocarbons 276-7w
Higher education admission 81-2w
Pornography 402w

EC Draft 6047/88
(28:11:88) 531-54

EC Draft 7325/88
(28:11:88) 531-54

EC Draft 7876/88
(01:12:88) 936-58

EC Draft 8106/88
(30:11:88) 804-24

EC Draft 8149/88
275w, 281w, 283w, 422w

EC Draft 8961/88
(30:11:88) 825-45

EC Draft 9185/88/1
(01:12:88) 902-28

EC Draft 9185/88/2
(01:12:88) 902-28

EC Draft 9185/88/3
(01:12:88) 902-28

EC Draft 9312/88
(01:12:88) 902-28

EC Economic & Finance Council
see EC Finance Council

EC Environment Council
199-200w, 275w, 281w
Nature conservation 202w

EC external relations
European Free Trade Association 307w

EC external trade
Butter 239w
Dairy products 100w

EC Finance Council
67w

EC Fisheries Council
205-6w, 327w

EC Foreign Affairs Council
11-2w, 697-8
Extradition 698

EC General Affairs Council
see EC Foreign Affairs Council

EC grants & loans
171w, 269-71w
Fisheries 97w

EC grants & loans—continued
Scotland 335-6w
Unemployment 45w
Wakefield (29:11:88) 679-86

EC Internal Market Council
252-3w

EC internal trade
305w, 307w
Publicity 251w

EC law
699
Water pollution 138w

EC reform
Common agricultural policy 320w

EC social policy
288w

EC trade
Nature conservation 362w

ECOFIN
see EC Finance Council

"Economic & Social Research Council Annual Report, 1987/88"
3w

Economic League
Companies' political contributions 102w
Government contracts 67w

Economic regions
Channel tunnel 155w

Economic sanctions
South Africa 293w

Economic situation
Queen's Speech (29:11:88) 579-675
Severn bridge 89w, 179-80w

Educational administration
Haberdashers Askes School 404w
Inner London boroughs 402-3w

Educational finance
City technology colleges 15w
Further education colleges 340w
Inner London boroughs 19-20w, 403w

Educational institutions
Animal experiments 177w

Educational qualifications
Higher education admission 176-7w

EEC
see European Economic Community

Efficiency scrutinies
2w, 72w
Mergers 102w
Takeovers 102w

"Efficiency Scrutiny of the Supervision of Charities"
2w

EFTA
see European Free Trade Association

Eggar, Mr Tim, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs
Questions
Afghanistan, USSR 295w
Air pollution control, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 313w
Calero, Adolfo 306w
Canada, Ministers' visits abroad 303-4w
Caribbean, Drug abuse 289w
Caribbean, Foreign policy 184w
Caribbean, Health services 302w
Caribbean, Smuggling 691-2
Central America, Heads of state 298w
Central America, USA 306w
Chile 288w
Chile, Democracy 693
Chile, Elections 693
Chile, Human rights 692-3

Eggar, Mr Tim—continued
Chile, Montes, Jorge 296w
Chile, Political prisoners 289w
China, Human rights 108-9w
Cuba, Foreign policy 306w
Cultural relations, Treaties 106-7w
Cultural relations, USSR 106w
El Salvador, Human rights 295w
Environment protection, International cooperation 316w
Falkland Islands, Argentina 307w
Fiji, Foreign policy 108w, 296w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Civil service recruitment 302w
Gibraltar, IRA 186w
Hong Kong 297w
India, British embassies 304w
Kampuchea, UN Security Council 292-3w
Montalban, Emilio Alvarez, Official visits 109-10w
Nicaragua, Disaster relief 692
Pakistan 304w, 315w
South Africa, International Atomic Energy Agency 293w
South Georgia, Exclusive economic zones 307-8w
Thailand, Prerogative of mercy 107w
Thailand, Prisoners 107-8w
UN General Assembly 293-4w
UN Secretariat 294w
UNESCO 186w
United Nations, Children's rights 185w
Universal Declaration of Human Rights 300w
USA 297w
USA, Foreign policy 297w
USA, Ministers' visits abroad 108w
USSR, Human rights 108w
Vietnamese refugees, Hong Kong 291-2w
Vietnamese refugees, Resettlement 185w
Visas, British embassies 308-10w

Eggs
Common agricultural policy 866-7
Food poisoning 146w
Salmonella 426w

Egypt
Defence 264w

EIB
see European Investment Bank

El Salvador
Human rights 295w

Elderly
Death 439-40w
Medical treatments 254-5w
NHS & private practice 57-8w
NHS finance 254w
Population 189w
Residential care 180w, 182w, 198w
Wales 180w

Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
1R (24:11:88) 238

Elections
Chile 693

Electorate
Birmingham 189-90w
Local government constituencies 189-90w

Electric lighting
Energy conservation 286w
Government departments 281w
Retail trade 367w

Electricity Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
1R (30:11:88) 731-2

Electricity generation
Alternative energy 125w

Electricity meters
341w

Electricity supply industry
Privatisation 286-7w, 341-2w, (30:11:88) 731-2

Electricity tariffs
Nuclear power stations 287w
Privatisation 342w

Electronic equipment
Defence equipment 231w
Prisoners' rights 35w

Electronic surveillance
Offenders 74w, 398w, 410-1w
Testing 410-1w

Electronics industry
Chlorofluorocarbons 420w

Embassies
Local government finance 363-4w
Rates & rating 106w

Emergency planning
Association of Chief Police Officers 38w
Greater London 203-4w
Local authorities 38w
London Fire & Civil Defence Authority 63-4w
Publicity 38w

Emery, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 765, 769-75, 786, 802

Emigration
USSR 109w

Employment
Agriculture 325w
Armed forces reserves 215-6w
Graduates 405w

Employment Act 1988
Questions
Commencement orders 435w

Employment Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
1R (30:11:88) 732

Employment discrimination
Age 273w

Employment opportunities
Southwark & Bermondsey 368w

Employment Subsidies Act 1978 (Renewal) (Great Britain) Order 1988
Debates etc.
(28:11:88) 436

Employment Training
113-4w
Administrative delays 111w
Age 111w
Lancashire Trust for Nature Conservation 434-5w
Managing agents 111w
Newham 273w

Energy conservation
Electric lighting 286w
Lighting 248w

Energy consumption
Cremation 47w
NHS 188w

Energy research
Air pollution 125-6w
Air pollution control 273w
Research finance 125w

Enforcement Powers of the Revenue Departments Committee
see Inland Revenue Review of Enforcement Powers Committee

English Tourist Board
369w
Tourism 110-1w

Enterprise zones
Environment protection 66w

Environment
EC aid 258-9w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 279w

Environment—continued
Queen's Speech (28:11:88) 438-530
Road construction 164w

Environment protection
Enterprise zones 66w
Hedges & ditches 859
International cooperation 281w, 316w
Set-aside schemes 318w

Environmental health
War casualties 61w

Environmental health officers
Industrial health & safety 433-4w

Environmental impact assessment
66w, (02:12:88) 1019-32

Environmental policy
363w

Environmentally sensitive areas
328w

EOC
see Equal Opportunities Commission

EP Committee on Energy Research & Technology
285w

EPIC
see European Proliferation Information Centre

Epping Forest
By election writs (23:11:88) 111-4

Equal opportunities
(30:11:88) 732

Equal Opportunities Commission
411w
Pre-school education 235w

Equal pay
Confederation of British Industry 273w
Sex discrimination 411w

Espionage
USSR 344w

ESRC
see Economic & Social Research Council

Estate agents
Codes of practice 365w

EURATOM
285w
Nuclear safeguards 285w

Europe
Air routes 163-4w

Europe Open for Business
251w

European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund
97w, 335-6w
Scotland 337-8w

European Atomic Energy Community
see EURATOM

European Charter of Local Self-Government
274w
Local authorities 10w

European Commission
46w, 103w, 171w, 279w, 304w
Public appointments 343w

European Commission of Human Rights
290-2w

European Communities (Finance) Act 1988
Questions
1-2w

European Convention on Human Rights
Complaints 290-2w

European Council
67w, 178w, 331-3w

European Court of Human Rights
185w, 393-4w
Judgments 573

European Court of Justice
171w

European Economic Community
(25:11:88) 335-406

European fighter aircraft
415w, 566-7
Radar 567-8

European Free Trade Association
EC external relations 307w

European Investment Bank
336w
Scotland 336-7w

European monetary system
572

European Parliament constituencies
Scotland 183w

European Parliament Members
Palace of Westminster 434

European Proliferation Information Centre
Nuclear safeguards 310-1w

European Regional Development Fund
335-6w, (29:11:88) 679-86
Scotland 337-8w

European Security Conference
702-3
Human rights 401w

European Social Fund
335-6w

Evans, Mr David
Questions
Air routes, Europe 163-4w
Defence, Kuwait 223w
Forestry Commission 319w
Waste disposal, Privatisation 62w

Evans, Mr John
Questions
Cars, Computer applications 165-6w
Contraceptives, Health warnings 138-9w
Dalkon shield, Compensation 439w
Private education, Charities 358w
Trident, Defence expenditure 559-60

Evennett, Mr David
Questions
Armed forces medical services, NHS 228w
Bus services, Greater London 158w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Civil service recruitment 302w
Tourism 110w
Unemployment, Bexley 574

Evidence
Student Support Review 353w

Ewing, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Official Report (30:11:88) 727-8
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 582, 607
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 712-3
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 542-4

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 922-3
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 713
Questions
Business statements 891
Channel tunnel, Scotland 424
EC Foreign Affairs Council 697-8
Elderly, Medical treatments 254-5w
Elderly, NHS finance 254w

Excise duties

Tax harmonisation 67w

Exclusive economic zones
South Georgia 307-8w

Exhaust emission controls
160-1w

Exhaust emissions
276w

Explosives
International cooperation 218w
Production 266w
Royal Ordnance 220-1w, 223w, 266-7w

Export controls
Transport of hazardous materials 201w

Export rebates
Food industry 239w, 425w

External financing limits
Water authorities 130w

Extradition
Crown Prosecution Service 869
EC action 698-9
EC Foreign Affairs Council 698
Republic of Ireland 871-2
Ryan, Patrick 572-3, 869, 871-2, 875-90

Eye tests
259w

Facsimile transmission
Members' facilities 434-5

Factor VIII
Blood Products Laboratory 440w

Factory closures
Royal Ordnance 563
Tobacco industry 366w

Factory Inspectorate
430-2w
Age 434w
Civil service manpower 433w

Fair Trading Act 1973
Questions
366w

Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 710
Questions
Blood tests, Scottish courts 256w
Scottish assembly 698

Falkland Islands
Argentina 307w

Family credit
Social security benefits rates 392w
Take-up 389w

Family Law Reform Act 1987
Questions
176w

Family practitioner committees
Prescriptions 12w

Farm & conservation grants scheme
100-1w, 323w

Farm capital grant scheme
100-1w

Farm incomes
Green pound 868

Farmers
Community charge 867
Compensation 99-100w
Northern region 867

"Farmers' Guide to the Planning System"
319w

Farms
Waste disposal 323w

Faserwerk Bottrop
103w

Fatchett, Mr Derek
Questions
Nurses, Industrial disputes 192-3w
Tanks 226w

Faulds, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (30:11:88) 698
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 592, 594, 595

Favell, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 58
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 467, 474, 481, 490, 513-4
Questions
Defence, USA 227w
Identity cards, Association of Chief Police Officers 74w
Lloyd's of London, Self-regulatory system 367w
Manchester Airport, Railway network 420-1
Shares, Computer applications 366w

Fawley B
287w

FCO
see Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Fearn, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Development aid 257-8w
EC aid, Environment 258-9w
Environment protection, International cooperation 281w
NHS, Air pollution 188w
Overseas aid, Civil service manpower 258w
Overseas aid, Expenditure 258w
Radiation Incident Monitoring Network 203w
Radiation Incident Monitoring Network, Manchester 203w
Road accidents, Costs 164w
Rutland Memorial Hospital, Maternity services 437w

Fees & charges
Locums 57w

FEOGA
see European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund

Ferranti
51w

Field, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 29
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 123
Questions
Caribbean, Foreign policy 184w
EC internal trade, Publicity 251w
Garlic, Agricultural production 204w
HMS Endurance 232w
Light dues, Boats 166w
Lobsters, Fish conservation 237w
Minesweeping, Hovercraft 232w
Official engagements 178w, 343-4w
Ports, Shipping 208w
South Georgia, Exclusive economic zones 307-8w
Tourism 110w
USA, Ministers' visits abroad 108w

Field, Mr Frank
Questions
Employment Training 113-4w
Hereford Cathedral, Mappa mundi 428
Poverty trap, Social security & taxation 385w

Fields, Mr Terry
Questions
Nurses, Industrial disputes 573-4

Fiji
Foreign policy 108w, 296w

"Financing Public Library Service Consultation Paper"
49w, 342w

Fine defaulters
243w

Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Questions
Members' correspondence 397w

Fire prevention
Private sector housing 244w

Fire services
London Underground 408w

Fires
King's Cross 64w

First time buyers
575-6

Fish
Mercury 198w
Mercury pollution 283w
Tributyl tin 326w

Fish conservation
Lobsters 237w

Fish farming
Pesticides 99w

Fishburn, Mr Dudley
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 277-9

Fisher, Mr Mark
Questions
Cultural relations, Treaties 106-7w
Cultural relations, USSR 106w
Design 67-8w
Design, Civil service manpower 44w
Design, Finance 44-5w
Design, Invisible exports 44w
Housing benefits, Administrative delays 43w
Housing benefits, Social security appeals 42-3w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits rules 42w
Housing benefits, Social security claims 42w
Land ownership & tenure, Severn-Trent Water Authority 63w
Sewers, Stoke-on-Trent 62-3w
Social Fund 43-4w
Social Fund, Finance 44w
Social Fund, Publicity 43w
USSR, Cultural relations 305w

Fisheries
Cornwall 321w
Devon 321w
EC action (01:12:88) 902-28
EC grants & loans 97w
Marine animals 860
North Sea 329w

Fishery agreements
Norway (01:12:88) 902-28

Fishing vessels
Licensing 204w
Marine animals 324w
Submarines 216w

Flannery, Mr Martin
Questions
Housing benefits, Administrative costs 412-3w
IRA, Gibraltar 216w
Railway electrification, Midland main railway line 154w

Flannery, Mr Martin—continued
South Africa, Ministers' visits abroad 702
USSR 294w

Flexible response
NATO 225w

Flynn, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 301-2, 321
Questions
Merchant ships 215w
Milk, Production 317w
Severn bridge, Economic situation 89w
Severn bridge, Road tolls 89w, 167-8w

Fontainebleau Summit
UK repayments from EC budget 356-7w

Food
Harmonisation of legislation 204w

Food consumption
Cereals 55w

Food contamination
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 98w, 862-3
Honey 240w
War casualties 57w

Food imports
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 862-3

Food industry
Export rebates 239w, 425w

Food packaging
Chlorofluorocarbons 419w
Health hazards 96w

Food poisoning
317w
Eggs 146w

Food prices
Agricultural subsidies 865
Food surpluses 67w

Food surpluses
328w
Food prices 67w

Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Questions
Business statements 231

Football
Arrests 130w, 274-5w
Hooliganism 410w
Identity cards 275w

Foreign aid
World Bank 70w

Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Air pollution control 313w
Civil service recruitment 302w

Foreign investment in UK
251w

Foreign loans
International Development Association 69w

Foreign policy
699-700
Argentina 689
Baltic republics of USSR 184w
Caribbean 184w
Cuba 306w
Fiji 108w, 296w
Gulf states 298w
Iran 300w
Poland 302-3w
Queen's Speech (25:11:88) 335-406
USA 297w, 701
USSR 294w

Forestry
Tax allowances 48w

Forestry Commission
319w

Forman, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 490-3

***Forsyth, Mr Michael**, Under-Secretary of State for Scotland*
Questions
Ambulance services, Glasgow 417w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Scotland 118w
Breast cancer, Screening 40-1w
Elderly, Medical treatments 254-5w
Elderly, NHS finance 254w
European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund, Scotland 337-8w
Further education colleges, Educational finance 340w
Health centres, VAT 336w
Health service ancillary staff, Privatisation 254w
Heart pacemakers, Greater Glasgow Health Board 253w
Higher education, Scotland 183w
Leukaemia, Child health 255w
Mental health community care, Scotland 116w
Mental health services, Scotland 116w
Mental hospitals, Scotland 116-7w
NHS, Consumers 183w
NHS, Scotland 40w
NHS finance, Scotland 39w
Nurses, Career structure 340-2w, 417-8w
Nurses, Scotland 118-9w
Nurses, Scottish health boards 118w
Schizophrenia, Expenditure 117w
Schizophrenia, Hospital admissions 419w
Schizophrenia, Hospital discharges 257-8w, 418-20w
Schizophrenia, Mental health community care 117w
Schizophrenia, Research finance 117w
Schizophrenia, Scotland 256-8w
Scottish health boards, Contracts for services 334-5w
Scottish health boards, Contracts of employment 334w
Scottish health boards, Pay incentives 253w
Scottish health boards, VAT 253w
"Scottish Health Service", Costs 254w
Technical education, Scotland 39w
Whitley councils, Appeals 253w

***Forth, Mr Eric**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs*
Questions
Air pollution control, Dept of Trade & Industry 253w
Design, Civil service manpower 44w
Design, Finance 44-5w
Design, Invisible exports 44w
Estate agents, Codes of practice 365w
Hearing aids, Private health services 171w
Industry, Civil defence 406w
Motor vehicle safety 170w
Motor vehicles, USA 169w
National Engineering Laboratory, Privatisation 171-2w
Patent Office, Civil service dispersal 169w
Post Office Users' National Council 253w

Foulkes, Mr George
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 141-2
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 709, 718-9
Questions
Chile, Democracy 693
Guatemala, Warships 333-4w
Hydrography, Guatemala 350w

***Fowler, Rt Hon Norman**, Secretary of State for Employment*
Debates etc.
Employment Bill, 1R (30:11:88) 732
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 276, 283, 314, 319, 323-8
Questions
Vacancies, Departmental correspondence 113w

France
295w
Defence 215w
Military alliances 232w

Franks, Mr Cecil
Questions
Africa, Ministers' visits abroad 304w
Army, Career structure 350w
Farms, Waste disposal 323w
Motorways, Speed limits 156w
Teacher training, Recruitment 10w
Trident submarines, Defence contracts 222w
Unemployment, Clwyd 47-8w
Unemployment, Lancashire 113-4w
USSR, Human rights 308w

Fraser, Mr John
Questions
Public transport, Greater London 415-6
Special education, Bromley 352-3w
Sylvan High School Croydon, City Technology Colleges 402w
Turkey, Human rights 301w

Fraud
Unemployment benefits 367w

***Freeman, Mr Roger**, Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces*
Debates etc.
Aircraft noise, RAF Upper Heyford (30:11:88) 852-6
Questions
Armed forces, Racial discrimination 225w
Armed forces casualties, Compensation 225w
Armed forces deployment, Northern region 569
Armed forces medical services, NHS 228w
Armed forces pensions, Widows' benefits 227w
Armed forces recruitment, Armed forces strength 232w
Armed forces reserves 228w
Armed forces reserves, Employment 215-6w
Army, Career structure 350w
Army, Intimidation 223-4w
COD Donnington, Trade unions 221w
Defence industries, Northern region 569
Defence land, Land acquisition 229-30w
Defence land, Nottingham 349w
Hydrography, Guatemala 350w
Intimidation, Armed forces 349w
Intimidation, Bassingbourn barracks 349w
Low flying, Air safety 214w
Low flying, Hexham 214w
Low flying, Military aircraft 216w
Low flying, South West region 562-3
Ministry of Defence, Woolwich 414w
Procurement Executive, Northern region 570
Rescue services, Helicopters 219w
Rescue services, RAF Leuchars 219w
RNAD Milford Haven 414-5w
Royal Army Veterinary Corps, Dogs 222-3w
Sherwood forest, Defence land 234w
Territorial Army, Armed forces recruitment 224w
Territorial Army, Army strength 231-2w
Woolwich Arsenal, Property development 350w

Freightliner

Mergers 7-8w

French, Mr Douglas
Questions
Road safety, Publicity 161w

Frigates
Defence contracts 214-5w

Front line states
Ministers' visits abroad 293w

Funerals
Social Fund 90w

Further education
Age participation rates 79-82w

Further education colleges
Educational finance 340w
Scotland 340w

Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 716
Questions
Royal Ordnance Defence procurement 228w

Galbraith, Mr Sam
Questions
Ambulance services, Glasgow 417w
EC Agriculture Council 320w
Explosives, Royal Ordnance 220-1w
Health service ancillary staff, Privatisation 254w
Heart pacemakers, Greater Glasgow Health Board 253w
NHS, Consumers 183w
Nurses, Career structure 417-8w
Nurses, Scottish health boards 118w
Scottish health boards, Contracts for services 335w
Scottish health boards, VAT 253w
"Scottish Health Service", Costs 254w
University teachers, Occupational pensions 177w
VAT, NHS 267w
Whitley councils, Appeals 253w

Gale, Mr Roger
Questions
Palestine Liberation Organisation 298w

Galloway, Mr George
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 488-90

Garlic
Agricultural production 204w

Garrett, Mr John
Questions
Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, Civil service manpower 430w

Garrett, Mr Ted
Questions
Frigates, Defence contracts 215w

GATT
328w, (25:11:88) 335-406
USA 328w

GCHQ
see Government Communications Headquarters

GEC
231w

General Agreement on Tariffs & Trade
see GATT

General Electric Company
see GEC

General Medical Council
364-5w, 379w

Geriatric patients
Medical treatments 385-6w
Newcastle Health Authority 58-9w

Geriatric patients—continued
Scotland 254-5w
Wales 180-1w

Geriatrics
Medical research 88-9w
Scotland 254w

Gibraltar
289w
Homosexuality 185w
IRA 186w, 216w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 544-5
Questions
Animal feed, Cereals 204w
British Approvals Board for Telecommunications, Telephone charges 9w
Cereals, Agricultural production 323w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 423
Western European Union 304w

Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 371-3
Questions
Family credit, Social security benefits rates 392w
Housing benefits, London boroughs 92-3w
Pensioners, Earnings rules 182w
Pensioners, Retirement pensions 90w
Personal income, Married people 359w

Glasgow
174w
Ambulance services 417w

Glasgow District Council
(01:12:88) 857

Glyn, Dr Alan
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 64-5

Godman, Dr Norman A
Debates etc.
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 907-11, 925, 926-7
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 1000, 1015
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 58
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 710
Questions
Fisheries, Marine animals 860

Gold & foreign exchange reserves
411-2w

Golding, Mrs Llin
Questions
Bovine somatotropin, Milk 861

Goodlad, Mr Alastair
Questions
Lost working days, Schizophrenia 111w
Medical Research Council, Research finance 82-3w
Mental health community care, Mentally ill 143w
Mental health community care, Northern Ireland 122w
Mental health community care, Scotland 116w
Mental health community care, Wales 88w
Mental health services 435w
Mental health services, Joint financing 142-3w
Mental health services, Mentally disturbed offenders 143-4w
Mental health services, NHS finance 87-8w, 143w, 436-7w
Mental health services, Northern Ireland 122w
Mental health services, Scotland 116w
Mental hospitals, Northern Ireland 122w

Goodlad, Mr Alastair—continued
Mental hospitals, Scotland 116-7w
Mental hospitals, Wales 87w
Mental illness, Government grants 142w
Mental illness, Hospital beds 140-1w
Mental illness, Research finance 143w
Mental illness, Voluntary organisations 142w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Alternatives to prison 70-1w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Mental hospitals 71w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Prison population 70w
Psychiatric nurses, Manpower 190w
Psychiatric nurses, Northern Ireland 427w
Psychiatric nurses, Wales 88w
Schizophrenia, Expenditure 117w, 121w, 140w
Schizophrenia, Homelessness 87w, 117-8w
Schizophrenia, Hospital admissions 85-6w, 118-20w, 419w
Schizophrenia, Hospital beds 85w, 119w
Schizophrenia, Hospital discharges 85-8w, 119-21w, 257-8w, 418-20w
Schizophrenia, Medical research 82w, 139-40w
Schizophrenia, Mental health community care 87w, 117w, 120-2w, 140w
Schizophrenia, Mental patients 139w
Schizophrenia, Mentally disturbed offenders 117-8w, 121w, 235w
Schizophrenia, Research finance 86w, 117w
Schizophrenia, Scotland 256-8w

Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Questions
Caribbean, Smuggling 691-2

Gorbachev, Mikhail
248-9w

Gordon, Ms Mildred
Debates etc.
City of London (Spitalfields Market) Bill, Motion to proceed in present Session (01:12:88) 931-2

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 977, 986, 991-4, 998, 1003, 1004, 1007, 1016
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 628, 651-3
Questions
Drinking & driving, Publicity 157w
Postal services, Private sector 871

Gould, Mr Bryan
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 517-22, 523

Government assistance
Cathedrals 576
Countryside Commission 423-4w
National Tree Week 360w
Nature Conservancy Council 423-4w
Railway transport 162w

Government assistance to industry
West Germany 103w

Government Communications Headquarters
Trade union membership 303w

Government contracts
Economic League 67w

Government departments
Air pollution control 178w
Electric lighting 281w

Government grants
Hedges & ditches 859-60
Intermediate treatment 58w
Mental illness 142w
Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association 260w

Government grants to local authorities

Government grants to local authorities—continued
Camden Borough Council 64w
Community trusts 133w

Gow, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 603
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 156
Questions
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 879-90

Gower, Sir Raymond
Questions
Cruelty to children, Social workers' training 6-7w
Nurses, Career structure 242-4w, 348w

Graduates
Employment 405w
Labour market 352w

Graham, Mr Thomas
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 524
Questions
Royal Ordnance, Defence procurement 563

Grant, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
Structure plans, Cambridgeshire (28:11:88) 555-7
Questions
A1, Road works 419-20

Grant, Mr Bernie
Questions
British dependent territories, Immigration rules 243w
Codling, Errol, Illegal immigrants 398w
Roads, Greater London 153w
Teachers, Recruitment 19w
Territorial Army, Armed forces recruitment 224w

Grant maintained schools
Parents 15w

Greater Glasgow Health Board
417w
Heart pacemakers 253w

Greater London
Bus services 158w
Buses 420
Emergency planning 203-4w
Housing construction 5w
Prison staff 393w
Prisons 172w
Public transport 415-6, 426
Road traffic 416
Road traffic control 165w
Roads 153w
Social security abuse 367w
Transport 52-3w, 415

Green pound
326w
Farm incomes 868

Greenway, Mr Harry
Questions
"Agricultural & Food Research Council Annual Report, 1987/88" 3w
Armed forces recruitment, Armed forces strength 232w
Business statements 232-3
Cathedrals, Building repairs 67w
"Economic & Social Research Council Annual Report, 1987/88" 3w
Espionage, USSR 344w
Military balance 224w
Official engagements 178w
Perry Oaks sludge works 249w
Public sector housing, Housing finance 130w
Road traffic, Greater London 416
Road traffic control, Greater London 165w
USSR, Lein, Alex 66w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 841
Questions
Agriculture, EC action 326w
USSR 294w

Gregory, Mr Conal
Debates etc.
British Rail, Pension Funds (24:11:88) 329-31
Questions
Banking Services Law Review Committee 105w
Kampuchea, UN Security Council 292-3w
Lorries, Sugar beet 157w
Registration of births deaths & marriages 383-4w
Tyre tread depths 417
Vehicle Inspectorate 211-2w

Greyabbey
Theft 428w

Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 70-5, 76, 77
Questions
Retirement pensions, Australia 263w

Griffiths, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 653-5
Questions
Agricultural research, Research finance 322w
Balance of trade 574

Griffiths, Mr Win
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 635-7
Questions
Interest rates 268w
Pesticides, Agricultural research 325-6w

Griffiths Committee
see Community Care Review

***Grist, Mr Ian**, Under-Secretary of State for Wales*
Questions
Air pollution control, Welsh Office 242w
Council house rents, Wales 242w
Geriatric patients, Wales 180-1w
Hospitals, Gwynedd 87w
Housing, Wales 47w
Mental health community care, Wales 88w
Mental health services, NHS finance 87-8w
Mental hospitals, Wales 87w
Nurses, Pay settlements 348w
Pharmacists, Wales 179w
Planning permission, Wales 241-2w
Preseli Pembrokeshire District Council, Housing stock 349w
Psychiatric nurses, Wales 88w
Residential care, Elderly 180w
Schizophrenia, Homelessness 87w
Schizophrenia, Hospital admissions 85-6w
Schizophrenia, Hospital beds 85w
Schizophrenia, Hospital discharges 85-8w
Schizophrenia, Mental health community care 87w
Schizophrenia, Research finance 86w

Grocott, Mr Bruce
Questions
COD Donnington, Trade unions 221w
Fine defaulters 243w
USA, Foreign policy 701

Ground, Mr Patrick
Questions
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 394w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, Administrative delays 393w

Ground water
Water pollution 424w

Group 4 Total Security
Immigrant detainees 71-2w

Grylls, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 487-8
Questions
Takeovers, Shares 366w

Guatemala
Hydrography 350w
Warships 333-4w

Guided weapons
USA 34w

Guildford
Bombings 36w

Gulf states
Foreign policy 298w
Ministers' visits abroad 299w

***Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn**, Minister for Housing and Planning*
Questions
Community charge 363w
Community charge, London boroughs 422-3w
Local government finance, Embassies 363-4w
Rates & rating 363w

Gurkhas
214w, 231w
Nepal 415-6w

Gwynedd
Hospitals 87w

Haberdashers Askes School
City technology colleges 403-4w
Educational administration 404w
School admission 403-4w

Halifax
Railway travel 354w

***Hamilton, Mr Archie**, Minister of State for the Armed Forces*
Questions
Alarm missiles 566
Armed forces, USSR 220w
Army in Northern Ireland, Armed forces strength 213-4w
Army strength 264-5w
Artillery 51w
BAOR, Military aircraft 230w
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament 220w
Chemical weapons, USSR 217w, 265w
Conventional weapons, Arms control negotiations 231w
Conventional weapons, Military balance 216w, 229w
Cruise missiles, Nuclear disarmament 219w
Defence, Computer privacy 566
Defence, USA 227w
Defence, West Germany 266w
Defence expenditure 217-8w, 221w, 228w
Defence procurement, USSR 265w
France, Defence 215w
Gurkhas 214w, 231w
Gurkhas, Nepal 415-6w
INF Treaty, Nuclear disarmament 265-6w
IRA, Gibraltar 216w
Merchant ships 215w, 560-2
Merchant ships, NATO 561
Military aircraft, USA 213w
Military alliances, France 232w
Military balance 224w
Minesweeping, Hovercraft 232w
Ministry of Defence, Computer privacy 230w
NATO, Flexible response 225w
NATO, Nuclear weapons 219w
NATO, Theatre nuclear weapons 218w
Navy, NATO 233w
Nuclear disarmament 221w

Hamilton, Mr Archie—continued
Nuclear test ban 264w
Nuclear weapons, Conventional weapons 562
Nuclear weapons, Modernisation 217w, 229w, 565-6
Nuclear weapons tests, NATO 222w
Submarines, Fishing vessels 216w
Theatre nuclear weapons, West Germany 230-1w
Trident, Defence expenditure 222w
Trident missiles, Arms control negotiations 562
Waldheim, Kurt, Nazi war crimes 264w
War casualties, Cemeteries 51-2w
War casualties, War graves 52w
Warsaw Pact, Armed forces 227w, 265w
Western European Union 225-6w

Hamilton, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 839-40
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 601, 603
Questions
Armed forces, USSR 220w
UK contributions to EC budget 1-2w

Hampson, Dr Keith
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 375, 386-8

Handicap benefits
Medical examinations 387-9w

Handicapped
Attendance allowance 388w
Doctors 388-9w
Residential care 141w
Youth training scheme 370w

Hanley, Mr Jeremy
Questions
Eastern Europe, Human rights 302w

Hannam, Mr John
Debates etc.
Petroleum Royalties (Relief) & Continental Shelf Bill, 2R (30:11:88) 743-6

Hardy, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 250
Questions
A1, Road travel 419
British Steel Corporation, Profit sharing 170w
Electricity meters 341w
Hedges & ditches, Environment protection 859
Nuclear weapons, Modernisation 229w
Youth training scheme, South Yorkshire 369w

Hargreaves, Mr Ken
Questions
Armed forces civilians, Teachers 233-4w

Harland & Wolff
Privatisation 46w

Harman, Ms Harriet
Questions
Doctors, Manpower 151w
Health service staff, Managers 60w
Health service staff, Vacancies 60w
Health service staff, Women 61-2w
Nurses 60w
Nurses, Maternity leave 60w
Nurses, Vacancies 60w
Nursing homes 383w
Sheltered housing, Local authorities 362w

Harmonisation of legislation
Food 204w

Harrington, Odile
Zimbabwe 109w

Harris, Mr David
Debates etc.
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 914-6
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 17
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 316-7, 319
Questions
Agriculture, Nitrates 9-10w, 321-2w
Employment Training, Administrative delays 111w
Hospital waiting lists, NHS finance 384w

Haselhurst, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 46-9

Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 124, 130-9, 141, 143, 144, 213

Hayes, Mr Jerry
Questions
Business statements 890

Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 151
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 250
Questions
Nurses, Industrial disputes 360

Haynes, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 781
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 244, 311-6, 326
Summertime, EC action (01:12:88) 938
Questions
Business statements 893
Road construction, Cycling 424-5

Hayward, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 249, 289, 291-5
Questions
Electorate, Local government constituencies 189-90w

Hazardous wastes
Imports 4-5w

Heads of state
Central America 298w

Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 339, 366-71

Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974
Questions
Prosecutions 431-4w

Health & Safety Commission
see Health & Safety Executive

Health & Safety Executive
430-4w
Building sites 434w
Industrial health & safety 434w

Health centres
Scotland 336w
VAT 336w

Health education
Heart diseases 435-6w

Health hazards
Bovine somatotropin 861-2
Food packaging 96w

Health service ancillary staff
Privatisation 254w
Scotland 254w

Health service staff
Calderdale Health Authority 380w
Ear nose & throat 195-6w
Managers 60w
Pay incentives 59w
Vacancies 60w
Women 61-2w

Health services
Caribbean 302w
Hearing aids 194w

Health warnings
Contraceptives 138-9w

Hearing Aid Council
171w

Hearing aids
193-5w
Administrative delays 193w
Audiology technicians 197w
Health services 194w
NHS 194-6w
Private health services 171w
Voluntary organisations 195w

Heart diseases
Health education 435-6w

Heart pacemakers
Greater Glasgow Health Board 253w

Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 598-604

Hedges & ditches
Environment protection 859
Government grants 859-60
Legislation 859

Heffer, Mr Eric S
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 246, 259-60, 274
Nicaragua, Disaster relief (29:11:88) 578
Oral question time intervention (01:12:88) 864
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 595
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 337-8, 343, 379-81, 401
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 137-8
Questions
Business statements 888
Nuclear weapons, Modernisation 217w
Nurses, Industrial disputes 364-5

Helicopters
Argentina 224w
Expenditure 231w
Patients' transport 145w
Rescue services 219w

Henderson, Mr Doug
Questions
Geriatric patients, Newcastle Health Authority 58-9w

Hereford cathedral
Mappa mundi 428, 430-1

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 440, 459-63

Hexham
343w
Low flying 214w

Hicks, Mr Robert
Questions
A38, Saltash bypass 423
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Compensation 324w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, South West region 863
Devonport dockyard, Defence contracts 230w

Hicks, Mr Robert—continued
Low flying, South West region 563
Middle East, Peace negotiations 301w

Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 622-5
Questions
London Regional Transport 415
Military decorations, Medals 402w
Waste disposal, Law reform 360w

Higher education
Age participation rates 79-84w
Local government expenditure 20-34w
Scotland 183w
Student numbers 81-2w

Higher education admission
EC countries 81-2w
Educational qualifications 176-7w
Mature students 78-9w

Hill, Mr James
Debates etc.
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 535-6, 541
Questions
Business statements 231

Hill livestock allowances
Marginal land 330w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Debates etc.
European Regional Development Fund, Wakefield (29:11:88) 684-5
Questions
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 421-2w
"Care in the Community" 60w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Domestic appliances 420w
Cook-chill catering, Codes of practice 145w
Cook-chill catering, Departmental publications 382w
Cook-chill catering, Laboratories 145w, 381w
Cook-chill catering, Listeria monocytogenes 145-6w, 382w
Cook-chill catering, Public Health Laboratory Service 382w
Eggs, Food poisoning 146w
Eggs, Salmonella 426w
HM Inspectorate of Pollution, Resignations 135w
Intermediate areas, Unemployment 45w
Lobbying, Access to Parliament 365w
Nurses, Industrial disputes 363-4
Public order policing, Students 396-7w
Regional planning & development, EC action 46w
Regional planning & development, Unemployment 45w
River pollution, Nitrogen 421w
River pollution, Yorkshire & Humberside 135-6w
River pollution, Yorkshire Water Authority 135w
Royal Ordnance, Intellectual property 223w
Sea pollution, Pollution monitoring 54w
Unemployment, EC grants & loans 45w
Wakefield Prison, Church services 74w
Water pollution, Industrial wastes 137w
Water pollution, Pesticides 136w

Hind, Mr Kenneth
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 717
Questions
Afghanistan, USSR 295w
Beans, Agricultural production 321w
Business statements 893
Channel tunnel, North West region 424
Channel tunnel, Railway transport 156w
Military vehicles, Lorries 226w
Procurement Executive, Northern region 570

Hind, Mr Kenneth—continued
Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, Rights of way 421w

Hinkley Point C
Public inquiries 285w

Hip replacements
180-1w, 385-6w

HIV Infection & AIDS Working Group
260-1w

HM Factory Inspectorate
see Factory Inspectorate

HM Inspectorate of Pollution
Resignations 135w

HMS Endurance
232w

HMS Fawn
350w

Hogg, Mr Douglas, Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office
Debates etc.
Summertime, EC action (01:12:88) 943-4, 952-8
Questions
Air pollution control, Home Office 246w
Animal welfare, Dogs 398-9w
Breathalysers 399-400w
Fine defaulters 243w
Fire prevention, Private sector housing 244w
Holloway Prison, Sanitation 173w
Homosexuality, Judgments 393-4w
Identity cards, Association of Chief Police Officers 74w
Leeds-Bradford Airport, Air traffic control 407w
Lindholme Prison, Public sector housing sales 397w
London Fire Brigade, Privatisation 35w
McCartney, Ronald, Prisoners' transfers 395w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Prison population 70w
Mulcahy, Keith, Members' correspondence 410w
Police, Leicestershire 244w
Police training, Ryton 74w
Prison staff, Public sector housing sales 172w, 397w
Prison staff, Tied housing 172w
Prison visits, Married people 172-3w
Prisoners' transfers, Mentally disturbed offenders 173w
Prisons, Sanitation 243w
Public order policing, Conferences 397w
Speed limits, Cameras 407w
Wakefield Prison, Church services 74w
Women's prisons, Day nurseries 243-4w

Holland, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 593

Holloway Prison
172w
Sanitation 173w

Holt, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Calling of Members, Prime Minister's questions (01:12:88) 900
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 991, 999-1005, 1010, 1017
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 78, 79, 81, 82, 89
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 128-9, 131, 139-44
Questions
Freightliner, Mergers 7-8w
Parliamentary broadcasting, Journalists 433

Home care services
Chiropody 259w

Home Office
Air pollution control 246w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 923, 926
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 141, 168, 180, 187, 189, 192-6
Questions
Farmers, Community charge 867
Iraq, Chemical weapons 688-9

Homelessness
Schizophrenia 87w, 117-8w

Homosexuality
Gibraltar 185w
Judgments 393-4w
Law reform 394w

Honey
Food contamination 240w
Radioactivity 240w

Hong Kong
297w
Vietnamese refugees 291-2w, 331w, 401w

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Explosives, International cooperation 218w

Hooliganism
Football 410w
Travel restrictions 410w

Hordern, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 629-31
Questions
Parole Review Committee 38-9w
Public Accounts Commission 429-30
Royal Ordnance 430

Horse racing
Finance 409-10w

Horserace Totalisator Board
Privatisation 409-10w

Horticulture
Research finance 238w

Hospital admissions
Schizophrenia 85-6w, 118-20w, 419w

Hospital beds
151w
Calderdale Health Authority 380w
Mental illness 140-1w
Schizophrenia 85w, 119w

Hospital consultants
Community physicians 188w

Hospital discharges
Community care 61w
Mental patients 380-1w
Schizophrenia 85-8w, 119-21w, 140-1w, 257-8w, 418-20w

Hospital waiting lists
197-8w
Costs 197w
Ear nose & throat 196w
NHS finance 384w
Publishing 153w

Hospitals
Air pollution control 191-2w
Gwynedd 87w
Ministers' domestic visits 192w
Waste disposal 191-2w

Hostages
Lebanon 300w

Hostels
Board & lodging charges 385-7w
Mental health community care 381w

Hotels
Birmingham 199w
Urban development grants 199w

House of Commons accommodation
Parliamentary buildings (02:12:88) 966-1018

House of Commons chamber
Lighting 126-7w, 360w, 365w

House of Commons debates
Speaker's rulings & statements (30:11:88) 803

House of Commons division of time
Private Members' time (24:11:88) 240

House of Commons library
(02:12:88) 966-1018

House of Commons procedure
(30:11:88) 763-803
Private Members' Bills 433
Speaker's rulings & statements (23:11:88) 114, (30:11:88) 779

House of Commons questions
Costs 285-6w

House of Commons sessional orders
(22:11:88) 1-2

House of Fraser
Takeovers 102w

Housing
Wales 47w

Housing action trusts
Nottingham 62w

Housing benefits
Administrative costs 412-3w
Administrative delays 43w
London boroughs 92-3w
Nottingham 262w
Retirement pensions 391-2w
Social security appeals 42-3w
Social security benefits rules 42w
Social security claims 42w

Housing construction
Greater London 5w

Housing Corporation
Finance 202w

Housing finance
Public sector housing 130w

Housing stock
Preseli Pembrokeshire District Council 349w

Hovercraft
Minesweeping 232w

***Howard, Mr Michael**, Minister of State for Local Government*
Questions
Enterprise zones, Environment protection 66w
Ground water, Water pollution 424w
National Rivers Authority 424w
Water authorities, Land ownership & tenure 425w
Water authorities, Occupational pensions 65-6w
Water pollution, Industrial wastes 137w
Water supply industry, Bye laws 134w
Water supply industry, Land 425w

Howarth, Mr George
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 40
Questions
Armed forces casualties, Compensation 225w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 324w

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 841-2
Official Report (30:11:88) 728

***Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey**, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 335-45, 349
Questions
Air traffic control, EC action 698
EC Foreign Affairs Council 11-2w, 697-8
EC law 699
Extradition, EC action 698-9
Extradition, EC Foreign Affairs Council 698
Foreign policy 699-700
Iraq, Chemical weapons 687-9
Israel, Palestine Liberation Organisation 690-1
Middle East, EC action 700
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Peace negotiations 693-5
Palestine Liberation Organisation, UN General Assembly 689-91, 695
Scottish assembly 698
Southern Africa, Peace negotiations 696-7
UN General Assembly 689
USA 287w
USA, Foreign policy 701
USA, NATO 700-1

Howell, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 633-5

Howell, Rt Hon Denis
Questions
Business statements 232

Howell, Mr Ralph
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Food prices 865
NHS, Laundries 188-9w

Howells, Mr Geraint
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 836
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 812-3
Questions
Bovine somatotropin, Health hazards 861-2
Sheep 326w

Hoyle, Mr Doug
Questions
Nurses, Career structure 440-1w

HSE
see Health & Safety Executive

Hughes, Mr John
Questions
Defence land, Land values 213w
Elderly, NHS & private practice 57-8w
Geriatric patients, Medical treatments 385-6w

Hughes, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Official Report (30:11:88) 728-9, 898
Petroleum Royalties (Relief) & Continental Shelf Bill, 2R (30:11:88) 734, 746, 753-6
Questions
Bright, Keith, Redundancy pay 162w
Namibia, Peace negotiations 288w
Ridley, Tony, Redundancy pay 355w
Southern Africa, Peace negotiations 696-7

Hughes, Mr Robert G
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 132, 155
Questions
Foreign investment in UK 251w
Housing Corporation, Finance 202w
Milk Marketing Board 96w, 323-4w
USA 297w
Waste disposal, Law reform 4w

Hughes, Mr Robert G—continued
Western European Union 225-6w

Hughes, Mr Roy
Questions
Channel tunnel, Wales 418w
Food surpluses 328w
Geriatrics, Medical research 88-9w
Passport Office, Civil service manpower 410w
Police training, Ryton 74w
Roads, Wales 416w
Severn bridge, Construction 167w

Hughes, Mr Sean
Questions
British Veterinary Association 319w
Nuclear weapons, Modernisation 565-6

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 23
Questions
Employment opportunities, Southwark & Bermondsey 368w
Hereford Cathedral, Mappa mundi 431
London Underground 159w
United Nations, Rain forests 303w

Human rights
Chile 692-3
China 108-9w
East West relations 702-3
Eastern Europe 302w
El Salvador 295w
European Security Conference 401w
Kurdistan 66w
Sudan 308w
Turkey 301w
USSR 108w, 184-5w, 289-90w, 308w, 401w, 703-4

Humberside
Cancer 260w

Hume, Mr John
Debates etc.
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (29:11:88) 577
Questions
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick 871-2

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Petroleum Royalties (Relief) & Continental Shelf Bill, 2R (30:11:88) 738, 739, 742, 748, 750-3
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 518
Questions
Agriculture, Nitrates 322w

***Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas**, Secretary of State for the Home Department*
Debates etc.
Official Secrets Bill, 1R (30:11:88) 732
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Bill, 1R (24:11:88) 238
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 121-30, 158
Security Service Bill, 1R (23:11:88) 120
Questions
Bombings, Guildford 36w
Charities, Management 2w
Civil defence, Nuclear weapons 38w
Demonstrations, Students 75-6w, 397w
Emergency planning, Association of Chief Police Officers 38w
Emergency planning, Local authorities 38w
Emergency planning, Publicity 38w
Hooliganism, Football 410w
Horserace Totalisator Board, Privatisation 409-10w
Parole Review Committee 38-9w
Police discipline, Coates, Alan 36w
Prison staff, Tied housing 393w
Prisoners' rights, Electronic equipment 35w
Public order policing, Students 174-6w, 395-7w
Safer cities scheme, Liverpool 411w
War casualties, Civil defence 37w
War casualties, NATO Civil Defence Committee 37w

Hydrocarbon oil duties
268w
Hydrography
Guatemala 350w
IAEA
see International Atomic Energy Agency
ICI
574-5
Identity cards
Association of Chief Police Officers 74w
Football 275w
IEPG
see Independent European Programme Group
ILEA
see Inner London Education Authority
Illegal immigrants
Codling, Errol 398w
Illsley, Mr Eric
Questions
UN General Assembly 293-4w
IMF
see International Monetary Fund
Immigrant detainees
Group 4 Total Security 71-2w
Securicor 71w
Immigration & Nationality Division
244-5w
Civil service manpower 75w
Immigration applications
311-4w
Administrative delays 393w
Appeals 311-4w
Indian subcontinent 393w
Immigration controls
Temporary immigrants 246w
Immigration rules
British dependent territories 243w
Political refugees 245-6w
Imperial Chemical Industries
see ICI
Import controls
Chlorofluorocarbons 405w
Transport of hazardous materials 201-2w
Imports
Hazardous wastes 4-5w
Motor vehicle safety 169w
Uranium 265w
Income
Privatisation 270w
Income support
94w
Dumfries & Galloway 413w
Residential care 44w
Social security benefits rules 91-2w
Young people 92w
Income tax
Means tested benefits 268w
Pensioners 105w
Income tax assessment
Postal deliveries 48w
Income tax returns
Inland Revenue 1w
Independent European Programme Group
225w
India
British embassies 304w
Indian subcontinent
Immigration applications 393w
Industrial disablement benefits
Reduced earnings allowance 389w
Industrial disputes
Nurses 192-3w, 358-65, 573-4
Industrial health & safety
Environmental health officers 433-4w
Health & Safety Executive 434w
Industrial safety
Nuclear weapons 230w
Industrial tribunals
114-6w
Legal aid 42w
Industrial wastes
Pollution control 421w
Water pollution 137w
Industry
Civil defence 406w
Queen's Speech (28:11:88) 438-530
INF Treaty
Nuclear disarmament 265-6w
Inflation
271w, 358w
Informative labelling
Bovine somatotropin 862
Ingham, Bernard
431
Ingram, Mr Adam
Questions
National Engineering Laboratory, Privatisation 171-2w, 184w
Nuclear disarmament 221w
Inland Revenue
48w, 105-6w
Income tax returns 1w
Inland Revenue Review of Enforcement Powers Committee
1w
Inner city areas
Church buildings 429
Inner London boroughs
Educational administration 402-3w
Educational finance 19-20w, 403w
Road traffic 153-4w
Inner London Education Authority
19-20w, 352-3w, 402-3w
Inquiries
Intelligence services (23:11:88) 218-26
Nuclear safeguards 310w
Insecticides
Drugs 205w
Institute of Psychiatry
70w
Insulation grants
284w
Intellectual property
Royal Ordnance 223w
Intelligence services
(23:11:88) 120
Inquiries (23:11:88) 218-26
Public service pensions 271w
Queen's Speech (23:11:88) 121-217
Supply Estimates 104w
Interest rates
268w
Balance of trade 357w
Consumer credit 412w
Manufacturing industries 412w
Intergovernmental agreement
1-2w
Intermediate areas
Unemployment 45w
Intermediate treatment
Government grants 58w
International Atomic Energy Agency
Nuclear safeguards 284-5w
Nuclear safety 284w
Radioactive waste disposal 284w
South Africa 293w
International conferences
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 309-10w
Ozone layer 5-6w, 574-5
International conferences—continued
Television 398w
International cooperation
Africa 296w
Environment protection 281w, 316w
Explosives 218w
International Development Association
Foreign loans 69w
International Monetary Fund
69-70w, 272w
UK contributions 13w
Intervention Board
239w, 425w
Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce
see Intervention Board
Intervention prices
Cereals 54-5w
Intervention stocks
Cereals 55-6w
Intimidation
Armed forces 349w
Army 223-4w
Bassingbourn barracks 349w
Investment
British Rail 160w
Invisible exports
Design 44w
IRA
Gibraltar 186w, 216w
Iran
Foreign policy 300w
Political prisoners 315w, 701
Iran-Iraq war
(25:11:88) 335-406, 701
Peace negotiations 701
Iraq
Chemical weapons 301-2w, 687-9
Kurdistan 299-300w, 687-8
Overseas trade 103w
Irish Republican Army
see IRA
Irish Sea
Radioactivity 240w
Iron Casting (Scientific Research Levy) (Abolition) Order 1988
Debates etc.
(28:11:88) 436
Israel
294w
Occupied territories 303w
Palestine Liberation Organisation 690-1
Italy
294w
Iwade bypass
Road construction 207w
Jack, Mr Michael
Questions
Capital gains tax, Pensioners 104-5w
Elderly, Population 189w
European fighter aircraft 567
Income tax, Pensioners 105w
Nitrates, Agricultural land 96w
Occupational pensions 105w
Retirement pensions, Social security recipients 182w
Road construction, Road mileage 166w
Tornado aircraft, Modernisation 104w
Jack Committee
see Banking Services Law Review Committee
Jackson, Mr Robert, Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science
Questions
Animal experiments, Educational institutions 177w

Jackson, Mr Robert—continued
Class sizes, Local education authorities 17-9w
Cost per pupil, Local education authorities 17w
Further education, Age participation rates 79-82w
Graduates, Employment 405w
Graduates, Labour market 352w
Higher education, Local government expenditure 20-34w
Higher education, EC countries 81-2w
Higher education, Student numbers 81-2w
Higher education admission, Educational qualifications 176-7w
Mature students, Higher education admission 78-9w
Medical Research Council, Research finance 82-3w
Pre-school education, Local education authorities 15-7w
Schizophrenia, Medical research 82w
Student grants 78w
Student grants, Expenditure 77-8w
Student loans 77-8w
Student loans, Costs 353w
Student loans, Private rented housing 77w
Student Support Review 353w
Student Support Review, Evidence 353w
Student Unions Review 353w
Student Unions Review, Civil service manpower 353-4w
Students, Social structure 80w
Teachers, Recruitment 19w
Universities, Student numbers 79-80w
University teachers, Occupational pensions 177w

Jamaica
Military aid to civil community 568
Overseas aid 568

Janman, Mr Tim
Questions
Family practitioner committees, Prescriptions 12w
Kampuchea, UN Security Council 292-3w

Janner, Mr Greville
Questions
Business statements 892
M1, Road traffic 417-8
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Peace negotiations 694
Police, Leicestershire 244w
Waldheim, Kurt, Nazi war crimes 264w

Japan
Balance of trade 253w

Jessel, Mr Toby
Questions
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 881

Jobclubs
Take-up of employment 272w

Johnston, Sir Russell
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 373-7
Questions
European Charter of Local Self-Government 274w

Joint financing
Mental health services 142-3w

Jones, Mr Gwilym
Questions
Local government expenditure, Wales 6w

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn
Debates etc.
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 806
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 504, 506-9
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 549
Questions
Agricultural research 326w

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn—continued
Beef premiums 205w
Geriatric patients, Wales 180-1w
Pharmacists, Manpower 192w
Pharmacists, Vacancies 437w
Pharmacists, Wales 179w
Residential care, Elderly 180w

Jones, Mr Martyn
Questions
Common agricultural policy, EC action 865-6

Jones, Mr Robert B
Questions
Parents, School governors 872

Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 836-7
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 811-2
Settle-Carlisle railway, Public petitions (29:11:88) 677-8

Journalists
Parliamentary broadcasting 432-3

Judgments
European Court of Human Rights 573
Homosexuality 393-4w

Jury vetting
176w

Kampuchea
Overseas aid 179w
UN Security Council 292-3w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 345-54, 403
Sharpeville six (23:11:88) 115
Questions
Palestine Liberation Organisation, UN General Assembly 691

Keith Committee
see Inland Revenue Review of Enforcement Powers Committee

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Questions
Nurses, Scotland 118-9w

Kent
Channel tunnel (02:12:88) 1019-32

Kent County Council
207w

Key, Mr Robert
Questions
Cathedrals, Government assistance 576
HIV Infection & AIDS Working Group 260-1w

Kilfedder, Mr James
Questions
Business statements 232
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 881-2

King, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 715
Questions
NATO, Flexible response 225w
Qatar 300-1w

***King, Rt Hon Tom**, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Debates etc.
Elected Authorities (Northern Ireland) Bill, 1R (24:11:88) 238
Questions
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 236-7w

King's Cross
Fires 64w

Kingsferry bridge
Road traffic 427

Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 13-9
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 591, 667
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 253, 257
Questions
Mortgages 575-6
Retail price index, Mortgage interest rates 869-71

Kirkhope, Mr Timothy
Questions
Common agricultural policy, EC reform 320w
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 572

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Debates etc.
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 906, 909, 925, 926
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 295-8
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 718
Questions
Common sheep meat regime 240w
Environment protection, International cooperation 316w
Lead free petrol 126w
Low flying, Military aircraft 216w
NHS, Scotland 40w
NHS finance, Scotland 39w
Scottish health boards, Contracts of employment 334w
Scottish health boards, Pay incentives 253w
Tax allowances, Forestry 48w
Technical education, Scotland 39w

Knapman, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 764-5
Questions
British Wool Marketing Board 318w
Western European Union 225-6w

Knight, Mr Greg
Questions
Council of Ministers 331-3w

Knowles, Mr Michael
Questions
Angola, Peace negotiations 297w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Expenditure 10w

Knox, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 33-8
Questions
Milk Marketing Board 323-4w
Nurses, Career structure 146-8w, 370-80w

Kurdistan
299w
Human rights 66w
Iraq 299-300w, 687-8
Refugees 14w, 299w, 317w

Kuwait
Defence 223w

Labelling
Aerosols 405-6w

Laboratories
Cook-chill catering 145w, 381w

Labour market
Graduates 352w

Labour Party
10 Downing Street 346w

Lamond, Mr James
Questions
Bed & breakfast accommodation 360-1w
USSR, Human rights 703-4

***Lamont, Rt Hon Norman**, Financial Secretary to the Treasury*
Questions
Capital gains tax 187w
Capital gains tax, Pensioners 104-5w
Income tax, Means tested benefits 268w
Income tax, Pensioners 105w
Income tax assessment, Postal deliveries 48w
Inland Revenue, Income tax returns 1w
Mortgage interest rates, Mortgage relief 268w
Mortgage relief, Tax yields 104w
Occupational pensions 105w
Oil revenues, North Sea oil 271w
Personal tax allowances, Tax reform 186-7w
Private education, Charities 358w
Privatisation, Income 270w
Supply Estimates, Intelligence services 104w
Tax allowances, Forestry 48w
Tax evasion, Civil service manpower 105-6w

Lancashire
Unemployment 113-4w

Lancashire Trust for Nature Conservation
Employment Training 434-5w

Land
Water supply industry 425w

Land acquisition
Defence land 229-30w

Land ownership & tenure
Severn-Trent Water Authority 63w
Water authorities 425w

Land use
Agricultural land 96w

Land values
Defence land 213w
Ministry of Defence 570

***Lang, Mr Ian**, Minister of State for Scotland*
Questions
Community charge, Scotland 255-6w
Community charge, Students 339w
EC grants & loans, Scotland 335-6w
European Investment Bank, Scotland 336-7w
European Regional Development Fund, Scotland 337-8w
National Engineering Laboratory, Privatisation 184w
Regional enterprise grants, Scotland 40w

Lasers
Defence equipment 51w

Latham, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 391-5
Questions
Bovine somatotropin 861
Business statements 891-2
Royal Army Veterinary Corps, Dogs 222-3w

Latham, Mr Michael—continued
Set-aside schemes 318w

Laundries
NHS 188-9w

Law reform
Homosexuality 394w
Road traffic offences 355w
Waste disposal 4-5w, 360w

Lawn mowers
Lead free petrol 366w

Lawrence, Mr Ivan
Questions
Angola, Peace negotiations 296w
Israel, Palestine Liberation Organisation 690-1
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Recognition of states 873-4

***Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel**, Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 590-7, 601, 609
Questions
Air pollution control, Treasury 358w
Personal income, Married people 359w

Lead free petrol
126w
Lawn mowers 366w

Lead pollution
Water supply 364w

Leader of the Opposition
Speaker's rulings & statements (01:12:88) 900

Lebanon
Hostages 300w

***Lee, Mr John**, Under-Secretary of State for Employment*
Questions
Bradford Resource Centre, Training 111-2w
Employment opportunities, Southwark & Bermondsey 368w
Jobclubs, Take-up of employment 272w
Lost working days, Schizophrenia 111w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 111w
Restart programme, Coventry 368w
Tourism 110w
Tourism, English Tourist Board 110-1w
Tourist industry 369w
Unemployment, Bradford 112w
Unemployment, Rural areas 367w
Unemployment benefits, Fraud 367w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits rules 368w
Work permits 370w

Leeds
Asbestos (25:11:88) 407-14

Leeds-Bradford Airport
Air traffic control 407w

Legal aid
Industrial tribunals 42w
Scotland 42w

Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986 Amendment Regulations 1988
Debates etc.
(01:12:88) 901

Legislation
Hedges & ditches 859

Leicestershire
Police 244w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Official Report (30:11:88) 727
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 443, 499-501

Leigh, Mr Edward—continued
Questions
Cereals, Agricultural production 323w
Conventional weapons, Arms control negotiations 231w
Conventional weapons, Military balance 229w
M11, Road construction 426
USSR, Foreign policy 294w

Leighton, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 279-83
Questions
British Transport Police, London Underground 408w
Cars, West Germany 170w
Employment Training, Age 111w
Employment Training, Managing agents 111w
Employment Training, Newham 273w
London Underground, Fire services 408w
London Underground, Manpower 209w
Offshore safety, North Sea 284w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits rules 368w
Youth training scheme, Clothing industry 272-3w

Lein, Alex
308w
USSR 66w

Lestor, Miss Joan
Questions
Angola, Peace negotiations 296w
British Aerospace, Defence contracts 564-5
Family Law Reform Act 1987 176w
International Monetary Fund, UK contributions 13w
Overseas aid, Expenditure 13w

Leukaemia
Child health 255w
Scotland 255w

Lewis, Mr Terry
Questions
Conventional weapons, Military balance 216w

Leyland Trucks
226w

Licensing
Bovine somatotropin 97w
Fishing vessels 204w

Light dues
Boats 166w

Lighting
Energy conservation 248w
House of Commons chamber 126-7w, 360w, 365w

***Lilley, Mr Peter**, Economic Secretary to the Treasury*
Questions
Banking Services Law Review Committee 105w
Business expansion scheme, Private rented housing 271w
Gold & foreign exchange reserves 411-2w
Hydrocarbon oil duties 268w
Inflation 271w, 358w
Interest rates 268w
Interest rates, Consumer credit 412w
Interest rates, Manufacturing industries 412w
International Monetary Fund 272w
Money supply 268w, 270-1w
Public sector debt 357-8w
VAT, Construction 267-8w
VAT, Defence equipment 359w
VAT, NHS 267w

Lindholme Prison
Public sector housing sales 397w

Listeria monocytogenes
Cook-chill catering 145-6w, 382w

Liverpool
Safer cities scheme 411w

Liverpool Prison
243w

Livingstone, Mr Ken
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland, Armed forces strength 213-4w

Livsey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 100
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 472
Questions
Green pound, Farm incomes 868
Nurses, Pay settlements 348w
Public order policing, Students 395-6w
Railway transport, Expenditure 158w
Single European Act 304w

Livshitz, Boris
308w

Lloyd, Sir Ian
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 793-7

***Lloyd, Mr Peter**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security*
Questions
Board & lodging charges, Hostels 385-7w
Child benefit, Children in care 413w
Child support 94-6w
Death grants 90w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Blackpool 263w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Bradford 91w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Carlisle 387w
Dept of Social Security local offices, North West region 263w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Nottingham 181w
Family credit, Social security benefits rates 392w
Family credit, Take-up 389w
Housing benefits, Administrative costs 412-3w
Housing benefits, London boroughs 92-3w
Housing benefits, Nottingham 262w
Income support 94w
Income support, Dumfries & Galloway 413w
Income support, Social security benefits rules 91-2w
Income support, Young people 92w
Members' correspondence 391w
Old persons' pensions, Age addition 91w
One parent families, Social security benefits 262-3w
Pensioners, Earnings rules 182w
Pensioners, Retirement pensions 90w
Pensions, Earnings rules 413-4w
Poverty trap, Social security & taxation 385w
Retirement pensions 392w
Retirement pensions, Australia 263w
Retirement pensions, Earnings rules 91w
Retirement pensions, Housing benefits 391-2w
Retirement pensions, Social security recipients 181-2w
Social Fund, Community care 93-4w
Social security benefits rules, Pensioners 89-90w
Unemployment benefits, Coventry 387w
Widows' benefits, Social security benefits uprating 414w
"Young People's Guide to Social Security", Bradford 390-1w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 532-5, 538, 539, 540, 549
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Food contamination 862-3
Business statements 894
Channel tunnel, North West region 155w
Interest rates, Manufacturing industries 412w
Motorways, Road traffic 418-9
Namibia, Peace negotiations 288w
Royal Ordnance, Explosives 223w

Lloyd's
see Lloyd's of London

Lloyd's Act 1982 Inquiry
367w

Lloyd's of London
Self-regulatory system 367w

Lobbying
Access to Parliament 365w, 396w
Speaker's rulings & statements (24:11:88) 239-40, 248, 251, 260, 261, 273, 274

Lobsters
Fish conservation 237w

Local authorities
Emergency planning 38w
European Charter of Local Self-Government 10w
Rent arrears 361w
Sheltered housing 362w

Local authority powers
Dog registration scheme 362w
Stray dogs 362w

Local education authorities
Class sizes 17-9w
Cost per pupil 17w
Pre-school education 15-7w

Local employer network scheme
272w

Local Government Act 1972
Questions
63-4w

Local Government Act 1988
Questions
362w

Local government constituencies
Electorate 189-90w

Local government elections
Northern Ireland (24:11:88) 238

Local government expenditure
Higher education 20-34w
Wales 6w

Local government finance
Embassies 363-4w
Rent increases 199w

Local Government Finance Act 1988
Questions
Rates & rating 282w

Local government revenue
Non-domestic rates 63w

Local government services
Management (02:12:88) 1034-40

Local government social services
Adoption 382-3w

Local government staff
Manpower 420w

Local plans
282w

Locums
Fees & charges 57w

Lofthouse, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
European Regional Development Fund, Wakefield (29:11:88) 679-82, 686
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 43-6

Lofthouse, Mr Geoffrey—continued
Questions
Armed forces reserves, Employment 215w
Intermediate areas, Unemployment 45w
Unemployment, EC grants & loans 45w
Vietnamese refugees, Hong Kong 292w

London boroughs
Community charge 422-3w
Housing benefits 92-3w
Right to buy 274w

London Fire & Civil Defence Authority
Emergency planning 63-4w

London Fire Brigade
408w
Privatisation 35w

London Local Authorities Bill (HL) 1987/88
Debates etc.
Order for consideration of motion read (29:11:88) 559
Order to proceed in present Session (01:12:88) 934-5

London Regional Transport
160w, 408-9w
Finance 426
Safety standards 426

London Regional Transport (Penalty Fares) Bill (HL) 1986/87
Debates etc.
Order for consideration of motion read (29:11:88) 559
Order to proceed in present Session (01:12:88) 934

London Transport
415
Safety standards 416-7

London Underground
159-60w
British Transport Police 408w
Fire services 408w
Manpower 209w, 408-9w
Railway safety 159w, 408-9w

London University
70w

Look After Your Heart
District health authorities 435-6w

Lord, Mr Michael
ritish Debates etc.
Settle-Carlisle railway, Public petitions (29:11:88) 678

Lord Chancellor
Air pollution control 259w

Lord Chancellor's Office
see Lord Chancellor

Lorries
Axle weights 157-8w
Military vehicles 226w
Motor vehicle safety 406w
Railway freight transport 417
Road accidents 406-7w, 409w, 417
Speed limits 407w
Sugar beet 157w

Lost working days
Schizophrenia 111w

Low flying
Air safety 214w
Hexham 214w
Military aircraft 216w
South West region 562-3

Loyden, Mr Eddie
Questions
Merchant ships 561

LRT
see London Regional Transport

***Luce, Rt Hon Richard**, Minister of State Privy Council Office (Minister for the Arts)*

Luce, Rt Hon Richard—continued
Questions
Air pollution control, Office of Arts & Libraries 342-3w
Arts finance, Nottingham 342w
British embassies, Ministers' visits abroad 49w
Civil servants' visits abroad, Expenditure 10w
Museums & galleries, Publicity 187w
Public libraries, Finance 49w, 342w

Lunar House
75w, 244-5w

M1
162-3w
Road traffic 417-9
Road traffic control 158w
Road works 418

M11
Road construction 426

M20
Road construction 207-8w

M25
Motorways 162-3w
Road traffic control 166w

M40
422
Road construction 165w

M61
Road construction 425

M66
Road construction 354-5w, 425-6

McAllion, Mr John
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 717
Questions
Fisheries, Marine animals 860
Inflation 271w
Italy 294w
Railway electrification, East coast railway line 154w

McAvoy, Mr Thomas
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 645-7
Questions
Central America, Heads of state 298w

McCartney, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 100, 101, 102
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 179-85
Questions
Agricultural & Allied Workers' National Trade Group 319w
Fiji, Foreign policy 108w
Royal Ordnance, Intellectual property 223w
Turkey, Human rights 301w

McCartney, Ronald
Prisoners' transfers 395w

McCrindle, Mr Robert
Questions
Agriculture, Nitrates 322w
Aircraft, Aircraft noise 209-11w
Aircraft noise, Noise control 211w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 407-8w
Community care 381w
Elderly, Residential care 198w
Food industry, Export rebates 239w
Graduates, Employment 405w
Graduates, Labour market 352w
Hospital waiting lists 197-8w
Hospital waiting lists, Costs 197w
Mental health community care, Hostels 381w
Mental patients, Hospital discharges 380-1w

McCrindle, Mr Robert—continued
Mental patients, Medical records 381w
Passport Office, Civil service manpower 173-4w
Passport Office, Computers in Government departments 174w
Passport Office, Overtime 174w
Passports 173-4w
Residential care, Elderly 182w
Youth training scheme 369w
Youth training scheme, Handicapped 370w
Youth training scheme, Take-up 369w

Macdonald, Mr Calum
Debates etc.
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 917-8
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 642-3
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 714
Summertime, EC action (01:12:88) 940-1, 957, 958
Questions
Agricultural research, Research finance 238w
Chile, Human rights 692-3
Nuclear test ban 264w
Official engagements 178w, 344w
Railway travel 165w
Sheep meat, Agricultural stabilisers 865
Unemployment, Rural areas 367w

McFall, Mr John
Questions
Merchant ships 560

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 187, 204-6

***MacGregor, Rt Hon John**, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 825-8
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 902-7
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 804-8, 820, 821
Questions
Agricultural research 326w
Agricultural research, Research finance 322w
Agricultural subsidies, Food prices 865
Agricultural surpluses, Cereals 858-9
Agricultural surpluses, Common agricultural policy 857-8
Agricultural surpluses, Co-responsibility levy 858
Agricultural surpluses, EC action 858
Agriculture, EC action 326w
Agriculture, Expenditure 327w
Agriculture, Nitrates 9-10w
Bovine somatotropin 861
Bovine somatotropin, Health hazards 861-2
Bovine somatotropin, Informative labelling 862
Bovine somatotropin, Licensing 97w
Bovine somatotropin, Medicines Act 1968 862
Bovine somatotropin, Milk 861
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 97-8w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 241w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Food contamination 98w
British Wool Marketing Board 318w
Butter, New Zealand 100w
Common agricultural policy, Common sheep meat regime 866
Common agricultural policy, EC action 865-6
Common agricultural policy, EC reform 320w
Common agricultural policy, Eggs 866-7
Common agricultural policy, Expenditure 319-20w
Common agricultural policy, Sheep meat 866
Common sheep meat regime, EC Agriculture Council 864-5

MacGregor, Rt Hon John—continued
Dairy products, EC external trade 100w
EC Agriculture Council 320w
EC budget, Common agricultural policy 321w
European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund 97w
Farm & conservation grants scheme 100-1w
Farms, Waste disposal 323w
Forestry Commission 319w
GATT 328w
GATT, USA 328w
Green pound 326w
Green pound, Farm incomes 868
Hill livestock allowances, Marginal land 330w
Monetary compensatory amounts 320w
Nuclear accidents, Compensation 99-100w
Planning permission, Departmental publications 319w
Polychlorinated biphenyl, Sea pollution 425w
Set-aside schemes 318w
Set-aside schemes, Take-up 318w
Sheep meat, Agricultural stabilisers 865
Women's Farmers' Union 327w

McKay, Mr Allen
Debates etc.
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 824
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 455, 484-7
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 294, 314
Questions
Algeria, Civil disorder 308w
Business statements 231-2
Chile, Political prisoners 289w
Kurdistan, Iraq 299-300w
Sudan, Human rights 308w
USSR, Visas 308w

MacKay, Mr Andrew
Questions
Enterprise zones, Environment protection 66w
Water supply industry, Bye laws 134w

McKelvey, Mr William
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 715
Questions
Israel, Occupied territories 303w

McLeish, Mr Henry
Questions
Attendance allowance, Administrative delays 389w
EC grants & loans, Scotland 335-6w
European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund, Scotland 337-8w
European Investment Bank, Scotland 336-7w
European Regional Development Fund, Scotland 337-8w
Health centres, VAT 336w
Industrial tribunals 114-6w
Legal aid, Industrial tribunals 42w
Marine animals, Fishing vessels 324w
Mobility allowance, Administrative delays 389w
Regional enterprise grants, Scotland 40w

Maclennan, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 124, 125, 167, 172-6
Questions
British Council, Arts finance 330-2w
Common agricultural policy, Sheep meat 866
Higher education, Scotland 183w
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 879

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (01:12:88) 895

McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Questions
Defence expenditure 221w
Lead free petrol, Lawn mowers 366w

McNair-Wilson, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 27, 53-7
Questions
A31, Stoney Cross 165w
Tanks 104w

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (30:11:88) 720

McTaggart, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 717
Questions
EC social policy 288w
Piper Alpha platform, Salvage 442w
Polychlorinated biphenyl, Sea pollution 425w

Madden, Mr Max
Debates etc.
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (30:11:88) 724
Questions
Bradford Resource Centre, Training 111-2w
City technology colleges, Bradford 77w, 354w
Community trusts 133w
Community trusts, Government grants to local authorities 133w
Dept of Health, Adelphi Building 144w
Dept of Health, Offices 144-5w
Dept of Health & Social Security, Richmond House 132w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Bradford 91w
Economic League, Companies' political contributions 102w
Government contracts, Economic League 67w
Immigrant detainees, Group 4 Total Security 71-2w
Immigrant detainees, Securicor 71w
Income support, Social security benefits rules 91-2w
Income support, Young people 92w
Nuclear weapons tests, NATO 222w
School leaving, Bradford 113w
Unemployment, Bradford 112w
Vocational guidance, School leaving 112w
"Young People's Guide to Social Security", Bradford 390-1w

Madel, Mr David
Questions
M1, Road works 418
M25, Motorways 162-3w

MAFF
see Ministry of Agriculture

Magistrates
Probation officers 75w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Nicaragua, Disaster relief (29:11:88) 577
Oral question time point of order (29:11:88) 568
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 67, 86-91
Settle-Carlisle railway, Public petitions (29:11:88) 676
Questions
Chile, Political prisoners 289w
Day care of children, Women's employment 383w
Hospital beds, Calderdale Health Authority 380w
Manufactured goods, Manufactured exports 365-6w

Mahon, Mrs Alice—continued
Mulcahy, Keith, Members' correspondence 410w
Multiple occupation, Domestic safety 361w
National mobility scheme, Private rented housing 361w
Nicaragua, Disaster relief 692
Nicaragua, Overseas aid 568
Nuclear weapons, Industrial safety 230w
Nurses, Career structure 379w
Public appointments, Professional qualifications 344w
Railway stations, Sowerby Bridge 354w
Railway travel, Halifax 354w
Rent arrears, Local authorities 361w

Major, Rt Hon John, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Balance of trade 357w
Balance of trade, Interest rates 357w
Public expenditure 267w
Rates & rating, Embassies 106w

Mallon, Mr Seamus
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 50-3
Road abandonment, Northern Ireland (01:12:88) 959-61
Questions
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 882

Managers
Health service staff 60w

Managing agents
Employment Training 111w

Manchester
Ambulance services 193w
Radiation Incident Monitoring Network 203w

Manchester Airport
Railway network 420-1

Mans, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 918-9
Questions
Business expansion scheme, Private rented housing 271w
Hazardous wastes, Imports 4-5w
NATO, Nuclear weapons 219w
Set-aside schemes, Environment protection 318w
United Arab Emirates, Ministers' visits abroad 297-8w

Manufactured exports
Manufactured goods 365-6w

Manufactured goods
Balance of trade 250-1w, 253w
Manufactured exports 365-6w
UK trade with EC 251w

Manufacturing industries
Interest rates 412w
Productivity 250w

Maples, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Addresses to the crown (22:11:88) 10-3

Mappa mundi
Hereford Cathedral 428, 430-1

Marek, Dr John
Questions
Military aircraft, USA 213w

Marginal land
Hill livestock allowances 330w

Marine animals
Fisheries 860
Fishing vessels 324w

Marine Directorate
Civil service manpower 53w

Marland, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 813-5
Questions
Agricultural surpluses, Co-responsibility levy 858

Marland, Mr Paul—continued
Agriculture, Expenditure 327w
Business statements 892

Marlow, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (01:12:88) 870
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 525
Unparliamentary expressions (01:12:88) 900
Questions
Business statements 893-4
M1, Road traffic 418
M1, Road traffic control 158w
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Peace negotiations 693-4
Tanks, Expenditure 231w

Married people
Personal income 359w
Prison visits 172-3w

Marshall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 604
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 718
Questions
Cathedrals, Costs 428
Defence procurement, Cost effectiveness 264w
Football, Arrests 274-5w
Football, Identity cards 275w
M25, Road traffic control 166w
Private Members' Bills, House of Commons procedure 433
Right to buy, London boroughs 274w
Royal Ordnance 564
Sharon Campbell Care & Aftercare Inquiry 259w
Unemployment benefits, Fraud 367w
Vietnamese refugees, Hong Kong 401w
Vietnamese refugees, Resettlement 401w

Martin, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 202-3
Questions
Canada, Ministers' visits abroad 303-4w
Estate agents, Codes of practice 365w
Jobclubs, Take-up of employment 272w
Portsmouth 214w

Martin, Mr Michael J
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 42, 57-9
Questions
Gurkhas 214w
Vietnamese refugees, Hong Kong 291w

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 815-6
Settle-Carlisle railway, Public petitions (28:11:88) 554
Questions
Agriculture, Employment 325w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Carlisle 387w
Dept of Social Security local offices, North West region 263w
Explosives, Royal Ordnance 221w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 301w

Mass media
Ministers' visits abroad 345w

Maternity leave
Nurses 60w

Maternity services
Rutland Memorial Hospital 437w

Mates, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (30:11:88) 722
Questions
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 572-3, 884

Mature students
Higher education admission 78-9w

***Maude, Mr Francis**, Under-Secretary of State for Corporate and Consumer Affairs*
Questions
Bookmakers, Office of Fair Trading 170w
Companies Registration Office (England & Wales) 405w
EC Internal Market Council 252-3w
Economic League, Companies' political contributions 102w
House of Fraser, Takeovers 102w
Intermediate areas, Unemployment 45w
Lloyd's of London, Self-regulatory system 367w
Manufacturing industries, Productivity 250w
Mergers, Efficiency scrutinies 102w
Mergers, Redundancy 102w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, Takeovers 251w, 253w
Regional planning & development, EC action 46w
Regional planning & development, Unemployment 45w
Satellite Information Services, Shares 250w
Shares, Computer applications 366w
Takeovers, Shares 366w
Unemployment, EC grants & loans 45w

***Mawhinney, Dr Brian**, Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Questions
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools 351w
Overseas students, Student grants 351-2w
Overseas students, Student numbers 352w
School meals, Northern Ireland 235-6w

Maxton, Mr John
Questions
Vietnamese refugees, Hong Kong 291-2w

Maxwell-Hyslop, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 787-90
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 806
Questions
Nurses, Career structure 59w

***Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick**, Attorney-General*
Questions
Air pollution control, Lord Chancellor 259w
Family Law Reform Act 1987 176w
Jury vetting 176w
Pornography, EC countries 402w
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 875-90

Meacher, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 317-23
Questions
London Underground, Fire services 408w
Nurses, Career structure 260w
Oil rigs, Offshore safety 441-2w
Public expenditure 267w
Vacancies, Departmental correspondence 113w

Meale, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 485
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 537, 544, 545, 548
Questions
Ministry of Defence, Computer privacy 230w

Means tested benefits
Income tax 268w

Medals
Military decorations 402w

Medical equipment
Costs 59w

Medical examinations
Handicap benefits 387-9w

Medical records
Contraceptives 138-9w
Mental patients 381w

Medical research
Geriatrics 88-9w
Schizophrenia 82w, 139-40w

Medical Research Council
437-8w
Research finance 82-3w

Medical treatments
Elderly 254-5w
Geriatric patients 385-6w

Medicines Act 1968
Questions
Bovine somatotropin 862

Medium term financial strategy
267w

***Mellor, Mr David**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Questions
AIDS, Screening 438-9w
Ambulance services, Manpower 380w
Audiology technicians, Recruitment 197w
Audiology technicians, Training 197w
Audiology technicians, Vacancies 196-7w
Breast cancer, Screening 151-2w
"Care in the Community" 60w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Drug side effects 148-9w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Finance 147-8w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Manpower 149w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Public appointments 149-50w
Community care 381w
Day care of children, Women's employment 383w
Doctors, Manpower 151w
Ear nose & throat, Health service staff 195-6w
Ear nose & throat, Hospital waiting lists 196w
Elderly, Residential care 198w
Eye tests 259w
Family practitioner committees, Prescriptions 12w
Health service staff, Managers 60w
Health service staff, Vacancies 60w
Health service staff, Women 61-2w
HIV Infection & AIDS Working Group 260-1w
Hospital beds, Calderdale Health Authority 380w
Hospital consultants, Community physicians 188w
Hospital waiting lists 197-8w
Hospital waiting lists, Costs 197w
Hospital waiting lists, NHS finance 384w
Hospital waiting lists, Publishing 153w
Locums, Fees & charges 57w
Mental health community care, Hostels 381w
Mental patients, Hospital discharges 380-1w
Mental patients, Medical records 381w
NHS, Laundries 188-9w
NHS, Regional health authorities 189w
NHS finance, Expenditure 193w
Nurses 60w
Nurses, Career structure 59w
Nurses, Industrial disputes 192-3w
Nurses, Maternity leave 60w
Nurses, Vacancies 60w
Nursing homes 383w
Opren, Radiation hazards 192w
Pharmacists, Manpower 192w
Pharmacists, Vacancies 437w

Mellor, Mr David—continued
Psychiatric nurses, Manpower 190w

Members
Postal services 95w

Members' conduct
Speaker's rulings & statements (28:11:88) 524, 525, 526, (29:11:88) 573, 676, (30:11:88) 695-6

Members' correspondence
391w, 397w
Administrative delays 97w, 111w, 128w, 278w
Mulcahy, Keith 410w

Members' facilities
Facsimile transmission 434-5
Palace of Westminster 431-2, 434
Speaker's rulings & statements (28:11:88) 437

Members' interventions
Speaker's rulings & statements (22:11:88) 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 29, (23:11:88) 168, (24:11:88) 247, (25:11:88) 401, (28:11:88) 462, 465, 466, (29:11:88) 584, 585, 587, 588, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, (30:11:88) 712

Members' misconduct
Speaker's rulings & statements (30:11:88) 728, 729, 730, 731, 732

Members' relatives
Speaker's rulings & statements (22:11:88) 70

Members' speeches
Speaker's rulings & statements (23:11:88) 116, 117, 118, (24:11:88) 241, 315, (25:11:88) 335, 373, (28:11:88) 438, 484, (29:11:88) 629, (30:11:88) 769, 793, (01:12:88) 911

Mental health community care
381w
Hostels 381w
Mentally ill 143w
Northern Ireland 122w
Schizophrenia 87w, 117w, 120-2w, 139-40w
Scotland 116w
Wales 88w

Mental health services
435w
Community nurses 190w
Joint financing 142-3w
Mentally disturbed offenders 143-4w
NHS finance 87-8w, 143w, 436-7w
Northern Ireland 122w
Scotland 116w
Wales 87-8w

Mental hospitals
Mentally disturbed offenders 71w
Northern Ireland 122w
Scotland 116-7w
Wales 87w

Mental illness
Government grants 142w
Hospital beds 140-1w
Research finance 143w
Voluntary organisations 142w

Mental patients
Hospital discharges 380-1w
Medical records 381w
Schizophrenia 139w

Mentally disturbed offenders
Alternatives to prison 70-1w
Mental health services 143-4w
Mental hospitals 71w
Northern Ireland 235w
Prison population 70w
Prisoners' transfers 173w
Schizophrenia 117-8w, 121w, 235w

Mentally ill
Mental health community care 143w

Merchant seamen
Certification 355-6w

Merchant Shipping (Safety at Work Regulations) (Non UK Ships) Regulations 1988
Debates etc.
(30:11:88) 732

Merchant ships
215w, 560-2
NATO 561

Mercury
Fish 198w

Mercury pollution
Fish 283w

Mergers
Efficiency scrutinies 102w
Freightliner 7-8w
Redundancy 102w

Mersey Regional Health Authority
440-1w

Meteorological Office
Civil service agencies 265w

Methane
Air pollution 276w

Metropolitan Police
37w, 174-6w

Meyer, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 92-5
Questions
Foreign policy 699-700

MI5
(23:11:88) 121-217

MI6
401w

Michael, Mr Alun
Questions
Armed forces reserves, Employment 215w
Official engagements 344w
Planning permission, Property development 277-8w
Planning permission, Wales 241-2w
Severn bridge, Economic situation 179-80w
Severn bridge, South Glamorgan 209w
Somalia, Chemical weapons 109w

Michie, Mr Bill
Questions
NATO Nuclear Planning Group 219w

Michie, Mrs Ray
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 184
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 709
Questions
Common sheep meat regime 323w
Community charge, Scotland 255-6w
Road construction, Private sector 422
Submarines, Fishing vessels 216w

Middle East
EC action 700
Peace negotiations 109w, 301w
USA 301w

Midland main railway line
206-7w
Railway electrification 154w

Midwives
Career structure 370-80w

Military aid to civil community
Jamaica 568

Military aircraft
BAOR 230w
Low flying 216w

Military aircraft—continued
USA 213w

Military alliances
France 232w

Military balance
224w
Conventional weapons 216w, 229w

Military decorations
Medals 402w

Military vehicles
Lorries 226w

Milk
Bovine somatotropin 861
Production 317w
Production quotas (30:11:88) 804-24

Milk Marketing Board
96w, 323-4w

Miller, Sir Hal
Questions
Business statements 887

Minesweeping
Hovercraft 232w

Minimum wage
Prosecutions 429-30w

Ministerial changes
178w

Ministerial policy advisors
Prime Minister 344w

Ministerial speeches
Speaker's rulings & statements (30:11:88) 709

Ministerial statements
Caledonian MacBrayne (30:11:88) 705-19
Speaker's rulings & statements (23:11:88) 115

Ministers' domestic visits
Birmingham 58w
Hospitals 192w

Ministers' visits abroad
Africa 304w
British embassies 49w
Canada 303-4w
Expenditure 347w
Front line states 293w
Gulf states 299w
Mass media 345w
Poland 35w, 247w
South Africa 702
Southern Africa 293w
United Arab Emirates 297-8w
USA 35w, 108w

Ministry of Agriculture
Air pollution control 240w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food
see Ministry of Agriculture

Ministry of Defence
Air pollution control 266w
Competition 349-50w
Computer privacy 230w
Land values 570
Woolwich 414w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
Questions
Coastal protection, Seas & oceans 327w
Road construction, Private sector 421-2

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 831-4
Questions
Balance of trade 357w
Gold & foreign exchange reserves 411-2w
Income tax, Means tested benefits 268w
Manufactured goods, Balance of trade 250-1w

Mitchell, Mr Austin—continued
Manufactured goods, UK trade with EC 251w
Money supply 268w, 270-1w
Mortgage interest rates, Mortgage relief 268w
Personal tax allowances, Tax reform 186-7w
Public sector debt 357-8w

MMC
see Monopolies & Mergers Commission

Moate, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 532, 539-42
Questions
A249, Road accidents 207w
A249, Road traffic 207w
A249, Road works 207w
A249, Roads 207w
European Free Trade Association, EC external relations 307w
Iwade bypass, Road construction 207w
Kingsferry bridge, Road traffic 427
Road construction, Planning 425

Mobility allowance
Administrative delays 389w

MOD
see Ministry of Defence

Modernisation
Nuclear weapons 217w, 229w, 565-6
Tornado aircraft 104w

Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 597-8
Questions
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 880

Monetary compensatory amounts
320w

Money supply
268w, 270-1w

Monopolies & Mergers Commission
102w, 170w, 366w
Takeovers 251w, 253w

Monro, Sir Hector
Questions
Agricultural education, Scotland 341w
Hill livestock allowances, Marginal land 330w

Montalban, Emilio Alvarez
Official visits 109-10w

Montes, Jorge
Chile 296w

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Questions
Manchester Airport, Railway network 421

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Questions
Explosives, International cooperation 218w

Moore, Rt Hon John, Secretary of State for Social Security
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 241-51, 252

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 665

Morley, Mr Elliot
Debates etc.
Public petitions, Seals (30:11:88) 848
Public petitions, Settle-Carlisle railway (30:11:88) 847-8
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 511-3

***Morley, Mr Elliot*—continued**
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 545-6

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 826
Questions
Ambulance services, Manchester 193w
Ambulance services, Manpower 380w

Morris, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (30:11:88) 721
Questions
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 875-8

***Morrison, Rt Hon Peter**, Minister of State for Energy*
Debates etc.
Petroleum Royalties (Relief) & Continental Shelf Bill, 2R (30:11:88) 733-8, 749, 755-6, 760-2
Questions
Electric lighting, Energy conservation 286w
Insulation grants 284w
Offshore safety, North Sea 284w
Oil industry safety, Civil service manpower 47w
Oil rigs, Offshore safety 441-2w
Piper Alpha platform, Salvage 442w

Mortgage interest rates
Mortgage relief 268w
Retail price index 869-71

Mortgage relief
Mortgage interest rates 268w
Tax yields 104w

Mortgages
575-6

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Petroleum Royalties (Relief) & Continental Shelf Bill, 2R (30:11:88) 756-8
Questions
British Rail, Investment 160w
Low flying, Air safety 214w

Motor vehicle registration
Standards specifications 356w

Motor vehicle safety
170w
Imports 169w
Lorries 406w

Motor vehicles
USA 169w

Motorcycles
Road accidents 164w

Motorways
M25 162-3w
Road traffic 418-9
Speed limits 156w

Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 143-4
Questions
EC internal trade 305w

***Moynihan, Mr Colin**, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sport)*
Questions
Football, Arrests 130w, 274-5w
Football, Identity cards 275w
Land ownership & tenure, Severn-Trent Water Authority 63w
National Rivers Authority, Public appointments 133w
National Rivers Authority, Water pollution 134w
River Mersey, River pollution 283w
River pollution, Dieldrin 132w
River pollution, Nitrogen 421w
River pollution, Standards enforcement 134-5w

***Moynihan, Mr Colin*—continued**
River pollution, Yorkshire & Humberside 135-6w
River pollution, Yorkshire Water Authority 135w
Sewage, Waste disposal 364w
Sewers, Stoke-on-Trent 62-3w
War casualties, Water pollution 138w
Water authorities, External financing limits 130w
Water authorities, Vacant land 362w
Water pollution, EC law 138w
Water pollution, Nottingham 131w
Water pollution, Pesticides 136w
Water supply, Lead pollution 364w
Water supply disconnections 280w
Water supply industry 132w

Mozambique
Overseas aid 68w

MRC
see Medical Research Council

Mudd, Mr David
Questions
Angola, UNITA 288w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 97w, 111w
Trade Union & Labour Relations Act 1974, Picketing 273w

Mulcahy, Keith
Members' correspondence 410w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Intelligence services, Inquiries (23:11:88) 218-23
Private notice questions (01:12:88) 901
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 639-40
Questions
Calero, Adolfo 306w
China, Human rights 108-9w
Diamond, Rt Hon Lord, Newspaper press 401w
Extradition, EC action 699
Gibraltar, IRA 186w
Inflation 358w
Lorries, Road accidents 409w, 417
Nuclear weapons, Modernisation 217w
Official engagements 178w, 344w
Oil revenues, North Sea oil 271w

Multiple occupation
Domestic safety 361w

Multiple sclerosis
Alternative medicine 379w
Diagnosis 440w

Murphy, Mr Paul
Questions
Southern Africa 293w

Museums & galleries
Publicity 187w

Museums Year
187w

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association
Government grants 260w

Namibia
Peace negotiations 288w

National Blood Transfusion Service
438-9w

National Engineering Laboratory
Privatisation 171-2w, 184w

National Farmers' Union
96w, 275w, 318w

National finance
see Treasury

National income
Development aid 68-9w

National Licensed Victuallers' Association
868

National mobility scheme
Private rented housing 361w

National parks
Planning appeals 417w

National Rivers Authority
(23:11:88) 119-20, 424w
Public appointments 133w
Water pollution 134w

National Society for Clean Air
191-2w

National Tree Week
Government assistance 360w

National Union of Students
174-6w, 396-7w

NATO
37w, 220w, 265-6w, (25:11:88) 335-406, 562, 565
Flexible response 225w
Merchant ships 561
Navy 233w
Nuclear weapons 219w
Nuclear weapons tests 222w
Theatre nuclear weapons 218w
USA 700-1

NATO Civil Defence Committee
War casualties 37w

NATO Nuclear Planning Group
219w, 571

Natural Environment Research Council
424w

Nature Conservancy Council
Finance 281-2w, 363w, 423-4w
Research 99w

Nature conservation
Azores 283w
EC action 275w, 281w, 283w, 422w
EC Environment Council 202w
EC trade 362w
Seals 860
Voluntary work 424w

Navy
NATO 233w

Nazi war crimes
Waldheim, Kurt 264w, 346w

NCC
see Nature Conservancy Council

***Needham, Mr Richard**, Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Debates etc.
Road abandonment, Northern Ireland (01:12:88) 961-4

Needham, Mr Richard—continued
Questions
Mental health community care, Northern Ireland 122w
Mental health services, Northern Ireland 122w
Mental hospitals, Northern Ireland 122w
Psychiatric nurses, Northern Ireland 427w
Schizophrenia, Expenditure 121w
Schizophrenia, Hospital admissions 119-20w
Schizophrenia, Hospital beds 119w
Schizophrenia, Hospital discharges 119-21w
Schizophrenia, Mental health community care 120-2w

Neill Committee
see Lloyd's Act 1982 Inquiry

NEL
see National Engineering Laboratory

Nellist, Mr Dave
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 666
Questions
Elderly, Death 439-40w
Restart programme, Coventry 368w
Unemployment benefits, Coventry 387w

Nelson, Mr Anthony
Questions
Nurses, Industrial disputes 364

Nepal
Gurkhas 415-6w

NERC
see Natural Environment Research Council

New Parliamentary building
(02:12:88) 966-1018

New Zealand
Butter 100w, (30:11:88) 825-45
Sheep meat 864-5

Newcastle Health Authority
Geriatric patients 58-9w

Newham
Employment Training 273w

Newport
Passport Office 410w

Newspaper press
Diamond, Rt Hon Lord 401w
Nurses 192-3w

***Newton, Rt Hon Tony**, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster & Minister of Trade & Industry*
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 522-6

NFU
see National Farmers' Union

NHS
Air pollution 188w
Armed forces medical services 228w
Consumers 183w
Energy consumption 188w
Hearing aids 194-6w
Laundries 188-9w
Personal income 193w
Regional health authorities 189w
Scotland 40w, 183w
VAT 267w

NHS & private practice
Contracts 152w
Elderly 57-8w

NHS finance
Elderly 254w
Expenditure 193w
Hospital waiting lists 384w
Mental health services 87-8w, 143w, 436-7w
Scotland 39w

NI Office
see Northern Ireland Office

Nicaragua
Disaster relief 13-4w, 692
Overseas aid 568

***Nicholls, Mr Patrick**, Under-Secretary of State for Employment*
Debates etc.
Asbestos, Cancer hazards (25:11:88) 411-4
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 301
Questions
Air pollution control, Dept of Employment 273-4w
Employment discrimination, Age 273w
Employment Training 113-4w
Employment Training, Administrative delays 111w
Employment Training, Age 111w
Employment Training, Lancashire Trust for Nature Conservation 434-5w
Employment Training, Managing agents 111w
Employment Training, Newham 273w
Equal pay, Confederation of British Industry 273w
Factory Inspectorate 430-2w
Factory Inspectorate, Age 434w
Factory Inspectorate, Civil service manpower 433w
Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974, Prosecutions 431-4w
Health & Safety Executive, Industrial health & safety 434w
Industrial health & safety, Environmental health officers 433-4w
Industrial tribunals 114-6w
Minimum wage, Prosecutions 429-30w
Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, Civil service manpower 430w
Trade Union & Labour Relations Act 1974, Picketing 273w
Unemployment, Lancashire 113-4w
Unemployment, Norfolk 114w

Nicholson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 297, 298-302
Questions
Concessionary fares, Bus services 406w
Nature conservation, EC action 275w
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Peace negotiations 693-4
Vietnamese refugees, Resettlement 185w, 394-5w

Nicholson, Miss Emma
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 517
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 864
Defence expenditure 228w

NII
see Nuclear Installations Inspectorate

NIREX
see Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive

Nitrates
131w
Agricultural land 96w
Agriculture 9-10w, 321-2w

Nitric acid
208w

Nitrogen
River pollution 421w

Nitrogen oxides
276w
Air pollution control 278-9w

Noise control
Aircraft noise 211w

Non-domestic rates
Local government revenue 63w

Norfolk
Unemployment 114w

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
see NATO

North Committee
see Road Traffic Law Review Committee

North East region
Channel tunnel 155w
Road construction 424

North Sea
Fisheries 329w
Offshore safety 284w

North Sea oil
Oil revenues 271w

North West region
Channel tunnel 155w, 423-4
Defence contracts 233w
Dept of Social Security local offices 263w
Road construction 425

North West Thames Regional Health Authority
440-1w

North Western Regional Health Authority
193w

Northern Ireland
Baton rounds 429w
Beef 429-30w
Beef premiums 427-8w
Local government elections (24:11:88) 238
Mental health community care 122w
Mental health services 122w
Mental hospitals 122w
Mentally disturbed offenders 235w
Overseas students 351-2w
Psychiatric nurses 427w
Public expenditure 236-7w
Road abandonment (01:12:88) 959-64
Schizophrenia 119-22w
School administration 351w
School meals 235-6w
Security 122-6w
Slaughterhouses 236w
Terrorism (24:11:88) 238, 430w

Northern Ireland Audit Office
429-30

Northern Ireland Comptroller & Auditor General
see Northern Ireland Audit Office

Northern Ireland Dept of Agriculture
236-7w

Northern Ireland Dept of Economic Development
236-7w

Northern Ireland Dept of Education
236-7w

Northern Ireland Dept of Health & Social Services
236-7w

Northern Ireland Dept of the Environment
236-7w

Northern Ireland Office
236-7w

Northern region
Armed forces deployment 569
Defence industries 569
Farmers 867
Procurement Executive 570

Norway
Fishery agreements (01:12:88) 902-28

Nottingham
130w
Acid rain 203w

Nottingham—continued
Arts finance 342w
Carbon monoxide 131w, 421w
City technolcgy colleges 76w
Council house sales 131w
Defence land 349w
Dept of Social Security local offices 181w
Housing action trusts 62w
Housing benefits 262w
Planning appeals 198-9w
Water pollution 131w

Nottingham City Council
342w

Nottingham Health Authority
Chiropody 187-8w

NSCA
see National Society for Clean Air

Nuclear accidents
Civil liability 286w
Compensation 99-100w
Pollution monitoring 100w

Nuclear disarmament
221w
Cruise missiles 219w
INF Treaty 265-6w

Nuclear fuel reprocessing
Dounreay 118w, 126w
Environment 279w
Sellafield 287w

Nuclear fuels
Nuclear reactors 286w

Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive
"Way Forward" 202w

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate
Civil service manpower 430w

Nuclear non proliferation
248-9w

Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty
International conferences 309-10w

Nuclear power stations
Electricity tariffs 287w
Radioactive waste disposal 283-4w

Nuclear reactors
Nuclear fuels 286w

Nuclear safeguards
EURATOM 285w
European Proliferation Information Centre 310-1w
Inquiries 310w
International Atomic Energy Agency 284-5w
Sellafield 285w

Nuclear safety
International Atomic Energy Agency 284w

Nuclear submarines
Radioactive waste disposal 233w

Nuclear test ban
248-9w, 264w

Nuclear weapons
Civil defence 38w
Conventional weapons 562
Defence research 51w
Industrial safety 230w
Modernisation 217w, 229w, 565-6
NATO 219w

Nuclear weapons tests
NATO 222w

Nursery schools
83-6w

Nurses
60w
Calderdale Health Authority 379w
Career structure 59w, 146-8w, 192w, 242-4w, 260w, 340-2w, 348w, 358-60, 370-80w, 417-8w, 440-1w

Nurses—continued
Industrial disputes 192-3w, 358-65, 573-4
Maternity leave 60w
Newspaper press 192-3w
Pay settlements 348w, 440-1w
Scotland 118-9w, 340-2w, 417-8w
Scottish health boards 118w
Vacancies 60w
Wales 242-4w, 348w

Nursing homes
383w

NUS
see National Union of Students

OAL
see Office of Arts & Libraries

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
European Regional Development Fund, Wakefield (29:11:88) 684
Questions
Dog registration scheme, Local authority powers 362w
Stray dogs, Local authority powers 362w

Occupational pensions
105w
University teachers 177w
Water authorities 65-6w

Occupied territories
Israel 303w

ODA
see Overseas Development Administration

OECD
see Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development

Offenders
Electronic surveillance 74w, 398w, 410-1w

Office of Arts & Libraries
Air pollution control 342-3w

Office of Fair Trading
102w
Bookmakers 170w

Office of Telecommunications
169w

Offices
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate 350w
Dept of Health 144-5w

Official engagements
178w, 343-4w

Official gifts
Reagan, Ronald 346w
USA 35w

Official hospitality
345-6w

Official Report
Speaker's rulings & statements (29:11:88) 581, 583, (30:11:88) 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, (01:12:88) 897-8, 899

Official secrets
Disclosure of information (30:11:88) 732
Official Secrets Act 1911 872
Queen's Speech (23:11:88) 121-217

Official Secrets Act 1911
Questions
Official secrets 872

Official Secrets Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
1R (30:11:88) 732

Official visits
Montalban, Emilio Alvarez 109-10w

Offshore safety
North Sea 284w
Oil rigs 441-2w

OFT
see Office of Fair Trading

OFTEL
see Office of Telecommunications

Oil industry safety
Civil service manpower 47w

Oil revenues
North Sea oil 271w

Oil rigs
Offshore safety 441-2w

Old people's homes
Private health services 261-2w

Old persons' pensions
Age addition 91w

One parent families
Social security benefits 262-3w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 338, 396-400, 403
Questions
Artillery 51w
Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Audit 50w
Challenger tanks 51w
Defence, USA 34w
Defence equipment 50w
Defence research, Privatisation 50-1w
Defence Statistical Organisation, Privatisation 51w
European fighter aircraft, Radar 567-8
Explosives, Production 266w
Guided weapons, USA 34w
Nuclear weapons, Defence research 51w
Royal Ordnarce, Explosives 266-7w
Royal Ordnance, Production 267w
Royal Ordnance, Property transfer 570-1

Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Debates etc.
Official Report (30:11:88) 897
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 588, 590

Opencast mining
Planning permission 137-8w

Oppenheim, Mr Phillip
Questions
Romania, Cornea, Doina 334w

Opren
Radiation hazards 192w

Oral questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (29:11:88) 568

Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development
70w

Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Debates etc.
Official Report (30:11:88) 726-7

"Our Common Future"
281w

Overseas aid
Civil service manpower 258w
Costs 69w
Expenditure 13w, 258w
Jamaica 568
Kampuchea 179w
Mozambique 68w
Nicaragua 568
Turkey 14w, 317w
Vietnam 68w

Overseas development
see Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Overseas Development Administration
258w

Overseas students
Northern Ireland 351-2w
Student grants 351-2w

Overseas students—continued
Student numbers 352w

Overseas trade
Iraq 103w

"Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom"
(23:11:88) 119

Overtime
Passport Office 174w

Owen, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 144-52

Own resources
1-2w

Ozone layer
International conferences 5-6w, 574-5
Science & technology research 280w

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 819
Structure plans, Cambridgeshire (28:11:88) 556
Questions
Agricultural surpluses, Cereals 858-9
Cereals, Agricultural production 56-7w
Cereals, Food consumption 55w
Cereals, Intervention prices 54-5w
Cereals, Intervention stocks 55-6w
Palestine Liberation Organisation 298w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 475-7

Pakistan
304w, 315w

Palace of Westminster
365w, 434-5
European Parliament Members 434
Members' facilities 431-2, 434
Press releases 431

Palestine
Recognition of states 184w

Palestine Liberation Organisation
298w, 301w
Israel 690-1
Peace negotiations 693-5
Recognition of states 873-4
UN General Assembly 689-91, 695

Paper industry
Chemicals 96w

Parents
Grant maintained schools 15w
School governors 872

Parking
Pedestrian areas 408w

Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil, Secretary of State for Energy
Debates etc.
Electricity Bill, 1R (30:11:88) 731-2
Petroleum Royalties (Relief) & Continental Shelf Bill, 1R (23:11:88) 120
Questions
Air pollution control, Dept of Energy 286w
House of Commons questions, Costs 285-6w

Parliamentary broadcasting
Journalists 432-3

Parliamentary buildings
House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 966-1018

Parliamentary privilege
Speaker's rulings & statements (23:11:88) 220

Parole Review Committee
38-9w

Parry, Mr Robert
Questions
NATO 220w
Tobacco industry, Factory closures 366w

Passport Office
Civil service manpower 72w, 173-4w, 410w
Computers in Government departments 174w
Newport 410w
Overtime 174w
Scotland 72w

Passports
173-4w

Patchett, Mr Terry
Questions
Armed forces reserves, Employment 216w
Factory Inspectorate 430-2w
Factory Inspectorate, Age 434w
Factory Inspectorate, Civil service manpower 433w
Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974, Prosecutions 431-4w
Health & Safety Executive, Industrial health & safety 434w
Industrial health & safety, Environmental health officers 433-4w

Patent Office
Civil service dispersal 169w

Patients' transport
Helicopters 145w

Patnick, Mr Irvine
Questions
Africa, International cooperation 296w
Environmentally sensitive areas 328w

Patten, Mr Chris, Minister of State for Overseas Development
Questions
Development aid 257-8w
Development aid, National income 68-9w
EC aid, Developing countries 69w
EC aid, Environment 258-9w
International Development Association, Foreign loans 69w
International Monetary Fund, UK contributions 13w
Kampuchea, Overseas aid 179w
Mozambique, Overseas aid 68w
Nicaragua, Disaster relief 13-4w
Overseas aid, Civil service manpower 258w
Overseas aid, Costs 69w
Overseas aid, Expenditure 13w, 258w
Turkey, Overseas aid 14w, 317w
United Nations, Rain forests 303w
Vietnam, Overseas aid 68w
World Bank, Foreign aid 70w

Patten, Mr John, Minister of State at the Home Office
Debates etc.
Intelligence services, Inquiries (23:11:88) 223-6
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 141, 142, 171, 210-7
Questions
Cellular phones, Cars 247w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 394w
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, Administrative delays 393w
Criminal Justice Act 1988, Sentencing 72w
Drinking & driving, Convictions 400w
Electronic surveillance, Offenders 74w
Equal pay, Sex discrimination 411w
Homosexuality, Law reform 394w
Magistrates, Probation officers 75w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Alternatives to prison 70-1w
Mentally disturbed offenders, Mental hospitals 71w
Offenders, Electronic surveillance 398w, 410-1w

Patten, Mr John—continued
"Punishment Custody & the Community", Alternatives to prison 75w

Pawsey, Mr James
Questions
A1-M1 link, Road construction 208w
Contraceptives, Expenditure 188w

Pay
Technicians (22:11:88) 103-10

Pay incentives
Health service staff 59w
Scottish health boards 253w

Pay settlements
Nurses 348w, 440-1w

Peace negotiations
Angola 296-7w
Iran-Iraq war 701
Middle East 109w, 301w
Namibia 288w
Palestine Liberation Organisation 693-5
Southern Africa 696-7

Pedestrian areas
Parking 408w

Pembrokeshire coast national park
Expenditure 347-8w

Pendry, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 463-8

Pension funds
British Rail (24:11:88) 329-34

Pensioners
Capital gains tax 104-5w
Earnings rules 182w
Income tax 105w
Retirement pensions 90w
Social security benefits rules 89-90w

Pensions
Earnings rules 413-4w

Pentonville Prison
172w

Perry Oaks sludge works
249w

Perryman, Rod
135w

Personal income
Married people 359w
NHS 193w

Personal tax allowances
Tax reform 186-7w

Pest control
Warble fly 238-9w

Pesticide residues
Potatoes 318-9w
Salmon 99w

Pesticides
Agricultural research 99w, 325-6w
Fish farming 99w
Water pollution 136w

Pesticides (Maximum Residue Levels in Food) Regulations 1988
Questions
318-9w

Petroleum Royalties (Relief) & Continental Shelf Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
1R (23:11:88) 120
2R (30:11:88) 733-62

Pharmacists
Manpower 192w
Vacancies 437w
Wales 179w

Physiology
Technicians (22:11:88) 103-10

Picketing
Trade Union & Labour Relations Act 1974 273w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 239, 240
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 477-80
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 181-2
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 294
Questions
Business statements 233
Channel tunnel, Economic regions 155w
Channel tunnel, North West region 423-4
Chile, Political prisoners 289w
Common sheep meat regime 323w
Interest rates, Consumer credit 412w
Official engagements 178w, 344w
Royal Ordnance, Intellectual property 223w

Pinegar, Arthur
145w, 381w

Piper Alpha platform
(30:11:88) 733-62
Salvage 442w

Planning
Road construction 425

Planning appeals
National parks 417w
Nottingham 198-9w
Wales 416-8w

Planning permission
Agricultural land 206w, 329w
Departmental publications 319w
Opencast mining 137-8w
Property development 277-8w
Town & Country Planning General Development Order 1977 133w
Wales 241-2w

Play groups
146w

Plessey
231w

PLO
see Palestine Liberation Organisation

Plutonium
Transport of radioactive materials 287w

Points of order
Speaker's rulings & statements (23:11:88) 127, (25:11:88) 365, (29:11:88) 568, (01:12:88) 895-6

Poland
Foreign policy 302-3w
Ministers' visits abroad 35w, 247w

Police
Leicestershire 244w
Westminster bridge 396w

Police discipline
Coates, Alan 36w

Police stations
Ards peninsula 428w

Police training
Ryton 74w

Political prisoners
Chile 289w
Iran 315w, 701

Political refugees
Immigration rules 245-6w

Pollution control
Industrial wastes 421w

Pollution Inspectorate
see HM Inspectorate of Pollution

Pollution monitoring
Nuclear accidents 100w
Sea pollution 54w

Polychlorinated biphenyl
Sea pollution 425w

Population
Elderly 189w

Pornography
EC countries 402w

Porter, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 67
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 167, 168

Porter, Mr David
Questions
Fisheries, North Sea 329w
France, Defence 215w

Portillo, Mr Michael, Minister for Public Transport
Debates etc.
British Rail, Pension Funds (24:11:88) 331-4
Channel tunnel, Railway network (02:12:88) 1025-32
Questions
Bright, Keith, Redundancy pay 162w
British Rail 159w
British Rail, Investment 160w
British Rail Engineering, Privatisation 157w
British Transport Police 427
British Transport Police, London Underground 408w
Bus services, Greater London 158w
Central London Rail Study 159w
Channel tunnel, Dulwich 155w
Channel tunnel, East Midlands 206-7w
Channel tunnel, Economic regions 155w
Channel tunnel, North East region 155w
Channel tunnel, North West region 155w, 423-4
Channel tunnel, Private sector 53w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 53w, 407-8w, 423
Channel tunnel, Railway stations 155-6w
Channel tunnel, Railway transport 156w
Channel tunnel, Railway travel 207w
Channel tunnel, Scotland 424
Channel tunnel, Transport 155w
Concessionary fares, Bus services 406w
Freightliner, Mergers 7-8w
Light dues, Boats 166w
London Regional Transport 160w
London Underground 159w
London Underground, Fire services 408w
London Underground, Manpower 209w
London Underground, Railway safety 159w, 408-9w
M40 422
Manchester Airport, Railway network 420-1
Marine Directorate, Civil service manpower 53w
Merchant seamen, Certification 355-6w
Ports, Shipping 208w
Railway electrification, East Coast railway line 154w
Railway electrification, Midland main railway line 154w
Railway electrification, Railway network 154w
Railway Inspectorate 161w
Railway Inspectorate, Railway safety 53-4w
Railway stations, Sowerby Bridge 354w
Railway transport, Expenditure 158w
Railway transport, Government assistance 162w
Railway transport, Private sector 427
Railway travel 165w
Railway travel, Halifax 354w
Ridley, Tony, Redundancy pay 355w
Road construction, Private sector 421-2
Roads, Expenditure 422-3
Settle-Carlisle railway 166-7w
Shipping, EC action 164-5w

Ports
154w
Roads 165w

Ports—continued
Shipping 208w

Portsmouth
214w

Post Office Users' National Council
253w

Postal deliveries
Income tax assessment 48w

Postal services
Members 95w
Private sector 871

Potatoes
Pesticide residues 318-9w

Poultry
Salmonella 426w

POUNC
see Post Office Users' National Council

Poverty trap
Social security & taxation 385w

Powell, Mr Ray
Debates etc.
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 970-6, 1018
Questions
Tanks 226w

Powell, Mr William
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 780-1

Power stations
Construction 287w

Prerogative of mercy
Thailand 107w

Pre-school education
Equal Opportunities Commission 235w
Local education authorities 15-7w

Prescott, Mr John
Debates etc.
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 541-2, 550
Questions
London Regional Transport 160w
London Regional Transport, Safety standards 416-7
Roads, Expenditure 422-3

Prescriptions
Family practitioner committees 12w

Preseli Pembrokeshire District Council
Housing stock 349w

Press
10 Downing Street 34w

Press releases
Palace of Westminster 431

Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
1R (24:11:88) 238

Price, Sir David
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 641-2
Questions
Merchant ships, NATO 561
Old persons' pensions, Age addition 91w
Shipping, EC action 164-5w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 43
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 258, 293, 302-7
Questions
Chile 288w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn—continued
Military aircraft, USA 213w
Montalban, Emilio Alvarez, Official visits 109-10w

Prime Minister
34-5w, 293w, 345w, 347w
Accounting 345w
Expenditure 345w
Ministerial policy advisors 344w

Prime Minister's Office
see Prime Minister

Prime Minister's Policy Unit
Costs 345-6w

Prime Minister's questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (01:12:88) 870, 873

Prison population
Mentally disturbed offenders 70w

Prison sentences
417-8w

Prison staff
Greater London 393w
Public sector housing sales 172w, 397w
Tied housing 172w, 393w

Prison visits
Married people 172-3w

Prisoners
Thailand 107-8w

Prisoners' rights
Electronic equipment 35w

Prisoners' transfers
McCartney, Ronald 395w
Mentally disturbed offenders 173w

Prisons
Greater London 172w
Sanitation 243w

Private education
Charities 358w

Private health services
Cancer 152w
Hearing aids 171w
Old people's homes 261-2w

Private Members' Bills
House of Commons procedure 433

Private Members' motions
(30:11:88) 733, (01:12:88) 901
Speaker's rulings & statements (30:11:88) 733

Private Members' time
House of Commons division of time (24:11:88) 240

Private notice questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (25:11:88) 361, 362, (01:12:88) 876, 884, 901

Private rented housing
Business expansion scheme 271w
National mobility scheme 361w
Student loans 77w

Private sector
Air pollution control 200-1w
Channel tunnel 53w
Postal services 871
Railway transport 427
Road construction 421-2
Road finance 421-2

Private sector housing
Fire prevention 244w

Privatisation
British Rail 427
British Rail Engineering 157w
Costs 343w
Defence research 50-1w
Defence Statistical Organisation 51w

Privatisation—continued
Electricity supply industry 286-7w, 341-2w, (30:11:88) 731-2
Electricity tariffs 342w
Harland & Wolff 46w
Health service ancillary staff 254w
Horserace Totalisator Board 409-10w
Income 270w
London Fire Brigade 35w
National Engineering Laboratory 171-2w, 184w
Scottish Bus Group (30:11:88) 705-19
Scottish Transport Group (30:11:88) 732
Waste disposal 62w
Water authorities (23:11:88) 119-20

Probation officers
Magistrates 75w

"Problems of Long Serving Ambulancemen"
380w

Procedure Select Committee
(30:11:88) 763-803

Procurement Executive
Northern region 570

Production quotas
Milk (30:11:88) 804-24

Productivity
Manufacturing industries 250w

Professional qualifications
Public appointments 344w

Profit sharing
British Steel Corporation 170w

Property development
Chelmsford 361-2w
Planning permission 277-8w
Woolwich Arsenal 350w

Property transfer
County Hall 422w
Defence land 570
Royal Ordnance 570-1
Stone Hospital 260w

Prosecutions
Cellular phones 247w
Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 431-4w
Minimum wage 429-30w

Provisional IRA
see IRA

Psychiatric nurses
Manpower 190w
Northern Ireland 427w
Wales 88w

Public Accounts Commission
429-30

Public appointments
Clay, Trevor 346w
Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members 12w
Committee on Safety of Medicines 149-50w
European Commission 343w
National Rivers Authority 133w
Professional qualifications 344w
Water authorities 128-30w

Public Appointments Unit
344w, 346w

Public expenditure
267w, 269-71w
Northern Ireland 236-7w

Public Health Laboratory Service
382w
Cook-chill catering 382w

Public inquiries
Hinkley Point C 285w

Public libraries
Finance 49w, 342w

Public order policing
Conferences 397w
Costs 395-6w

Public order policing—continued
Students 174-6w, 395-7w

Public petitions
Council housing (30:11:88) 846
Seals (30:11:88) 848
Settle-Carlisle railway (28:11:88) 554, (29:11:88) 676-8, (30:11:88) 845-8, (02:12:88) 965
Speaker's rulings & statements (30:11:88) 846

Public sector debt
357-8w

Public sector housing
Housing finance 130w

Public sector housing sales
Lindholme Prison 397w
Prison staff 172w, 397w

Public service pensions
Intelligence services 271w

Public transport
Greater London 415-6, 426

Publicity
Drinking & driving 157w
EC internal trade 251w
Emergency planning 38w
Museums & galleries 187w
Road safety 161w
Social Fund 43w

Publishing
Hospital waiting lists 153w

"Punishment, Custody & the Community"
Alternatives to prison 75w

Qatar
300-1w

Queen's flight
BAe 146 aircraft 229w

Queen's Speech
(22:11:88) 3-5, 6-102
Addresses to the Crown (22:11:88) 6-13
Defence (25:11:88) 335-406
Economic situation (29:11:88) 579-675
Environment (28:11:88) 438-530
Foreign policy (25:11:88) 335-406
Industry (28:11:88) 438-530
Intelligence services (23:11:88) 121-217
Official secrets (23:11:88) 121-217
Social security (24:11:88) 241-328
Welsh Grand Committee (28:11:88) 554

Queen's University Belfast
352w

Quin, Ms Joyce
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 62-4, 70
Questions
Agriculture, Nitrates 322w
Balance of trade, Interest rates 357w
European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund 97w
Fisheries, EC grants & loans 97w

Racial discrimination
Armed forces 225w

Radar
European fighter aircraft 567-8

Radiation hazards
Opren 192w

Radiation Incident Monitoring Network
203w
Manchester 203w

Radioactive waste disposal
279w
International Atomic Energy Agency 284w
Nuclear power stations 283-4w
Nuclear submarines 233w
Radioactive wastes 280w
Seas & oceans 279w

Radioactive wastes
Costs 279w
Radioactive waste disposal 280w

Radioactivity
Cumbria 100w, 329-30w
Honey 240w
Irish Sea 240w

RAF Leuchars
Rescue services 219w

RAF Upper Heyford
Aircraft noise (30:11:88) 849-56

Raffan, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 503-6

Railway electrification
East Coast railway line 154w
Midland main railway line 154w
Railway network 154w

Railway freight transport
Lorries 417

Railway Inspectorate
161w
Railway safety 53-4w

Railway network
Channel tunnel 53w, 407-8w, 423, (02:12:88) 1019-32
Manchester Airport 420-1
Railway electrification 154w

Railway safety
London Underground 159w, 408-9w
Railway Inspectorate 53-4w

Railway stations
Channel tunnel 155-6w
Sowerby Bridge 354w

Railway transport
Channel tunnel 156w
Expenditure 158w
Government assistance 162w
Private sector 427

Railway travel
165w
Channel tunnel 207w
Halifax 354w

Rain forests
United Nations 303w

Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 254
Questions
Hospital consultants, Community physicians 188w

Randall, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (30:11:88) 722-3
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 910

Rate precepts
63w

Rate support grants
Revenue support grant 63w

Rates & rating
363w
Embassies 106w
Local Government Finance Act 1988 282w

Rathbone, Mr Tim
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Northern region 569
Channel tunnel, Transport 155w
UN Secretariat 294w

RAVC
see Royal Army Veterinary Corps

Reagan, Ronald
Official gifts 346w

Recognition of states
Palestine 184w
Palestine Liberation Organisation 873-4

Recruitment
Audiology technicians 197w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 120w
Teacher training 10w
Teachers 19w

Redmond, Mr Martin
Questions
Environmental policy 363w
Industrial wastes, Pollution control 421w
Industry, Civil defence 406w

Reduced earnings allowance
Industrial disablement benefits 389w
Retirement 385w

Redundancy
Mergers 102w
Takeovers 102w
Tobacco industry 366w

Redundancy pay
Bright, Keith 162w, 355w
Ridley, Tony 355w

Redwood, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 30
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 716
Questions
Food, Harmonisation of legislation 204w
Inland Revenue, Income tax returns 1w
NHS, Regional health authorities 189w

Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 26
Settle-Carlisle railway, Public petitions (02:12:88) 965
Questions
Business statements 235
Leeds-Bradford Airport, Air traffic control 407w
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 881

Refugees
EC action 35-6w
Kurdistan 14w, 299w, 317w
Vietnam 185w, 401w

Reg(EEC)3626/82
362w

Regional enterprise grants
Scotland 40w

Regional health authorities
Clean Air Act 1956 191w
NHS 189w

Regional planning & development
EC action 46w
Unemployment 45w

Registration of births deaths & marriages
383-4w

Reid, Dr John
Questions
Royal Ordnance, Defence procurement 228w

Relocation of employees
Armed forces civilians 569

Rent allowances
Students 412-3w

Rent arrears
Local authorities 361w

Rent increases
Local government finance 199w

Renton, Mr Tim, Minister of State at the Home Office
Questions
British citizenship 245w
British citizenship, Administrative delays 244-5w
British dependent territories, Immigration rules 243w

Renton, Mr Tim—continued
Codling, Errol, Illegal immigrants 398w
Immigrant detainees, Group 4 Total Security 71-2w
Immigrant detainees, Securicor 71w
Immigration & Nationality Division, Civil service manpower 75w
Immigration applications, Administrative delays 393w
Members' correspondence 397w
Passport Office, Civil service manpower 72w, 173-4w, 410w
Passport Office, Computers in Government departments 174w
Passport Office, Overtime 174w
Passports 173-4w
Political refugees, Immigration rules 245-6w
Refugees, EC action 35-6w
Television 73-4w
Television, Broadcasting controls 72-3w
Television, International conferences 398w
Temporary immigrants, Immigration controls 246w
Vietnamese refugees, Resettlement 394-5w
Visas, EC action 36-7w

Repairs & maintenance
Cathedrals 428
Council housing finance 199w

Republic of Ireland
Extradition 871-2

Rescue services
Helicopters 219w
RAF Leuchars 219w

Research
Chlorofluorocarbons 419-20w
Nature Conservancy Council 99w

Research finance
Agricultural research 238w, 322w
Energy research 125w
Horticulture 238w
Medical Research Council 82-3w
Mental illness 143w
Natural Environment Research Council 281-2w
Schizophrenia 86w, 117w

Research Surveys of Great Britain
183w

Resettlement
Vietnamese refugees 185w, 394-5w, 401w

Residential care
Elderly 180w, 182w, 198w
Handicapped 141w
Income support 44w

Resignations
HM Inspectorate of Pollution 135w

Restart programme
Coventry 368w

Retail price index
Mortgage interest rates 869-71

Retail trade
Electric lighting 367w

Retirement
Reduced earnings allowance 385w

Retirement pensions
392w
Age addition (24:11:88) 241-328
Australia 263w
Earnings rules 91w
Housing benefits 391-2w
Pensioners 90w
Social security recipients 181-2w

Revenue support grant
Rate support grants 63w

Rhodes James, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 161

Richardson, Ms Jo

***Richardson, Ms Jo**—continued*
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 207-10
Questions
Child benefit, Children in care 413w
Contraceptives, Medical records 138-9w
Equal pay, Confederation of British Industry 273w
Equal pay, Sex discrimination 411w
Local government staff, Manpower 420w

Richmond House
144w
Dept of Health & Social Security 132w

Riddick, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 165
Questions
Countryside Commission 319w
Motorcycles, Road accidents 164w
Pakistan 304w
Tanks, Defence procurement 414w

***Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas**, Secretary of State for the Environment*
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 447-55
Water Bill, 1R (23:11:88) 119-20
Questions
Environmental policy 363w
European Charter of Local Self-Government, Local authorities 10w
HM Inspectorate of Pollution, Resignations 135w
Hotels, Urban development grants 199w
Local Government Finance Act 1988, Rates & rating 282w
Local plans 282w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 128w
Opencast mining, Planning permission 137-8w
Ozone layer, International conferences 5-6w
Sewage, Waste disposal 127w
Water authorities, Public appointments 128-30w

Ridley, Tony
162w
Redundancy pay 355w

***Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Debates etc.
Caledonian MacBrayne, Ministerial statements (30:11:88) 705-19
City of Glasgow District Council Order Confirmation Bill, 1R (01:12:88) 857
Transport (Scotland) Bill, 1R (30:11:88) 732
Questions
Agricultural education, Scotland 341w
European Parliament constituencies, Scotland 183w

Right to buy
London boroughs 274w

Rights of way
Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 421w

RIMNET
see Radiation Incident Monitoring Network

River Mersey
River pollution 283w

River pollution
Dieldrin 132w
Nitrogen 421w
River Mersey 283w
Standards enforcement 134-5w
Yorkshire & Humberside 135-6w
Yorkshire Water Authority 135w

RNAD Milford Haven
414-5w

Road abandonment
Northern Ireland (01:12:88) 959-64

Road accidents
A1 163w
A249 207w
Casualties 156-7w
Costs 164w
Death 249w
Down 428w
Drinking & driving 354w
Lorries 406-7w, 409w, 417
Motorcycles 164w
Road safety barriers 337-8w

Road construction
A1-M1 link 208w
Bypasses 158w
Cycling 424-5
Environment 164w
Expenditure 153w
Iwade bypass 207w
M11 426
M20 207-8w
M40 165w
M61 425
M66 354-5w, 425-6
North East region 424
North West region 425
Planning 425
Private sector 421-2
Road mileage 166w

Road damage
Buses 420

Road finance
Private sector 421-2

Road mileage
Road construction 166w

Road safety
Publicity 161w

Road safety barriers
Road accidents 337-8w
Scotland 337-9w

Road tax
Buses 420

Road tolls
Severn bridge 89w, 167-8w

Road traffic
A249 207w
Greater London 416
Inner London boroughs 153-4w
Kingsferry bridge 427
M1 417-9
Motorways 418-9

Road traffic control
166w
Greater London 165w
M1 158w
M25 166w
South East region 158w

Road Traffic Law Review Committee
355w, 407w

Road traffic offences
Law reform 355w

Road travel
A1 419

Road works
154w
A1 419-20
A69 425
A249 207w
M1 418

Roads
A249 207w
Deer 160w
Expenditure 158w, 422-3
Greater London 153w

***Roads**—continued*
Ports 165w
Wales 416w
Wandsworth 162w
West Midlands 158-9w

Roberts, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 452, 462

***Roberts, Mr Wyn**, Minister of State for Wales*
Questions
Geriatrics, Medical research 88-9w
Pembrokeshire coast national park, Expenditure 347-8w
Roads, Wales 416w
Severn bridge, Economic situation 89w, 179-80w
Severn bridge, Road tolls 89w

Robertson, Mr George
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 171-2
Questions
Community charge, Students 339w
Iraq, Chemical weapons 301-2w
Road safety barriers, Road accidents 337-8w
Road safety barriers, Scotland 339w
Turkey, Overseas aid 317w
Waldheim, Kurt, Nazi war crimes 346w

Robinson, Mr Peter
Questions
Harland & Wolff, Privatisation 46w

Roe, Mrs Marion
Questions
BAOR, Military aircraft 230w

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 20
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 453
Questions
Defence equipment, Lasers 51w
Royal Ordnance 564
Sheep premiums 324w

Romania
Cornea, Doina 334w

Rooker, Mr Jeff
Debates etc.
Official Report (30:11:88) 730
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 125, 126, 134
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 286-91
Questions
Baltic republics of USSR, United Nations 306w
Birmingham 177w
Birmingham, Ministers' domestic visits 58w
Cervical cancer, Screening 142w
Criminal Justice Act 1988, Sentencing 72w
Local government finance, Embassies 363-4w
Ports 154w
Rates & rating, Embassies 106w
Retirement pensions, Earnings rules 91w

Ross, Mr Ernie
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 610
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 710-1
Questions
Business statements 234
Merchant ships 215w
Palestine Liberation Organisation 298w
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Peace negotiations 694-5

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway transport 156w
Channel tunnel, Railway travel 207w
M20, Road construction 207-8w

Rowe, Mr Andrew—continued
Railway transport, Government assistance 162w
USA, NATO 700-1

Royal Army Veterinary Corps
Dogs 222-3w

Royal College of Surgeons
249w

Royal Ordnance
430, 564
Defence contracts 563-4
Defence procurement 228w, 563
Explosives 220-1w, 223w, 266-7w
Factory closures 563
Intellectual property 223w
Production 267w
Property transfer 570-1

Royal Ulster Constabulary
Recruitment 120w

Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast
Criminal damage 236w

RUC
see Royal Ulster Constabulary

Ruddock, Mrs Joan
Debates etc.
Explosions, ROF Burghfield (02:12:88) 1033
Questions
Chile, Montes, Jorge 296w
City technology colleges, Curriculum 14-5w
City technology colleges, Educational finance 15w
City technology colleges, School admission 14w
Grant maintained schools, Parents 15w
Haberdashers Askes School, City technology colleges 403-4w
Haberdashers Askes School, Educational administration 404w
Haberdashers Askes School, School admission 403-4w
NATO Nuclear Planning Group 571

***Rumbold, Mrs Angela**, Minister of State for Education and Science*
Questions
Air pollution control, Dept of Education & Science 235w
City technology colleges, Bradford 77w, 354w
City technology colleges, Nottingham 76w
Educational administration, Inner London boroughs 402-3w
Educational finance, Inner London boroughs 403w
Haberdashers Askes School, City technology colleges 403-4w
Haberdashers Askes School, Educational administration 404w
Haberdashers Askes School, School admission 403-4w
Pre-school education, Equal Opportunities Commission 235w
Sylvan High School Croydon, City Technology Colleges 402w

Rural areas
Speed limits 163w
Unemployment 367w

Rutland Memorial Hospital
Maternity services 437w

Ryan, Patrick
Extradition 572-3, 869, 871-2, 875-90

***Ryder, Mr Richard**, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Questions
Agricultural & Allied Workers' National Trade Group 319w
Agricultural land 328-9w
Agricultural land, Land use 96w
Agricultural land, Planning permission 329w

Ryder, Mr Richard—continued
Agricultural research, Research finance 238w, 322w
Agriculture, Employment 325w
Agriculture, Nitrates 321-2w
Air pollution control, Ministry of Agriculture 240w
Animal feed, Cereals 204w
Beans, Agricultural production 321w
Brewing industry, Codes of practice 868
Brewing industry, Tenancy agreements 868
Cereals, Agricultural production 56-7w, 323w
Cereals, Food consumption 55w
Cereals, Intervention prices 54-5w
Cereals, Intervention stocks 55-6w
Coastal protection, Expenditure 205w
Coastal protection, Seas & oceans 327w
Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 99w
Country Landowners' Association, Set-aside schemes 323w
Countryside Commission 319w
Eggs, Salmonella 426w
Environmentally sensitive areas 328w
Farmers, Community charge 867
Farmers, Northern region 867
Food, Harmonisation of legislation 204w
Food packaging, Health hazards 96w
Food poisoning 317w
Food surpluses 328w
Garlic, Agricultural production 204w
Hedges & ditches, Environment protection 859
Hedges & ditches, Government grants 859-60
Honey, Food contamination 240w
Horticulture, Research finance 238w
Insecticides, Drugs 205w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 97w
Nature Conservancy Council, Research 99w
Nitrates, Agricultural land 96w
Nuclear accidents, Pollution monitoring 100w
Pesticide residues, Salmon 99w
Pesticides, Agricultural research 99w, 325-6w
Potatoes, Pesticide residues 318-9w
Poultry, Salmonella 426w
Radioactivity, Cumbria 329-30w
Set-aside schemes 318w
Set-aside schemes, Environment protection 318w
Small Farmers' Association 325w
War casualties, Food contamination 57w

Ryton
Police training 74w

Safer cities scheme
Liverpool 411w

Safety standards
London Regional Transport 416-7, 426

***Sainsbury, Mr Tim**, Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement*
Questions
Air pollution control, Ministry of Defence 266w
Armed forces civilians, Teachers 233-4w
Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Audit 50w
BAe 146 aircraft, Queen's flight 229w
British Aerospace, Defence contracts 564-5
Challenger tanks 51w
Defence, Egypt 264w
Defence, Kuwait 223w
Defence, West Germany 231w
Defence contracts, North West region 233w
Defence equipment 50w
Defence equipment, Electronic equipment 231w
Defence equipment, Lasers 51w
Defence land, Land values 213w
Defence land, Property transfer 570
Defence procurement, Cost effectiveness 217w, 264w

Sainsbury, Mr Tim—continued
Defence procurement, Wales 568-9
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, Offices 350w
Defence research, Privatisation 50-1w
Defence Statistical Organisation, Privatisation 51w
Devonport dockyard, Defence contracts 230w
European fighter aircraft 415w, 566-7
European fighter aircraft, Radar 567-8
Explosives, International cooperation 218w
Explosives, Production 266w
Explosives, Royal Ordnance 220-1w
Frigates, Defence contracts 214-5w
Helicopters, Argentina 224w
HMS Endurance 232w
Independent European Programme Group 225w
International cooperation, Explosives 218w
Meteorological Office, Civil service agencies 265w
Military vehicles, Lorries 226w
Ministry of Defence, Competition 349-50w
Ministry of Defence, Land values 570
Nuclear submarines, Radioactive waste disposal 233w
Nuclear weapons, Defence research 51w
Nuclear weapons, Industrial safety 230w
Portsmouth 214w
Royal Ordnance, Explosives 223w, 266-7w
Royal Ordnance, Intellectual property 223w
Royal Ordnance, Production 267w
Royal Ordnance, Property transfer 570-1
Saudi Arabia, Defence 227-8w
Tanks 104w, 226w
Tanks, Defence contracts 104w
Tanks, Defence procurement 414w
Tanks, Expenditure 231w
Tornado aircraft, Modernisation 104w
Trident 222w
Trident, Costs 415w
Uranium, Imports 265w
Westland Helicopters, Defence procurement 232w

Salmon
Pesticide residues 99w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 919-22, 924, 926
Questions
Council of Ministers 291w

Salmonella
Eggs 426w
Poultry 426w

Saltash bypass
A38 423

Salvage
Piper Alpha platform 442w

Samoilovich, George
USSR 303w

Sanitation
Holloway Prison 173w
Prisons 243w

Satellite Information Services
Shares 250w

Saudi Arabia
Defence 227-8w

Schedule D income tax
48w

Scheduled offences
122-6w

Schizophrenia
70-1w, 82-3w
Expenditure 117w, 121w, 140w
Homelessness 87w, 117-8w
Hospital admissions 85-6w, 118-20w, 419w
Hospital beds 85w, 119w
Hospital discharges 85-8w, 119-21w, 140-1w, 257-8w, 418-20w

Schizophrenia—continued
Lost working days 111w
Medical research 82w, 139-40w
Mental health community care 87w, 117w, 120-2w, 139-40w
Mental patients 139w
Mentally disturbed offenders 117-8w, 121w, 235w
Northern Ireland 119-22w
Research finance 86w, 117w
Scotland 117-8w, 256-8w, 418-20w
Wales 85-8w

School administration
Northern Ireland 351w

School admission
City technology colleges 14w
Haberdashers Askes School 403-4w

School governors
Parents 872

School leaving
Bradford 113w
Vocational guidance 112w

School meals
Northern Ireland 235-6w

Science & technology research
Ozone layer 280w

Scope of debate
Speaker's rulings & statements (22:11:88) 100, 101, 102, (23:11:88) 111, 112, (24:11:88) 312, (01:12:88) 930, 931, 938, (02:12:88) 1005, 1018

Scotland
Agricultural education 341w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 118w
Breast cancer 41w
Channel tunnel 424
Community charge 255-6w, 339w
EC grants & loans 335-6w
European Agricultural Guidance & Guarantee Fund 337-8w
European Investment Bank 336-7w
European Parliament constituencies 183w
European Regional Development Fund 337-8w
Further education colleges 340w
Geriatric patients 254-5w
Geriatrics 254w
Health centres 336w
Health service ancillary staff 254w
Higher education 183w
Legal aid 42w
Leukaemia 255w
Mental health community care 116w
Mental health services 116w
Mental hospitals 116-7w
NHS 40w, 183w
NHS finance 39w
Nurses 118-9w, 340-2w, 417-8w
Passport Office 72w
Regional enterprise grants 40w
Road safety barriers 337-9w
Schizophrenia 117-8w, 256-8w, 418-20w
Technical education 39w
Whitley councils 253w

Scott, Mr Nicholas, Minister of State, Dept of Social Security
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 264, 265
Questions
Attendance allowance, Administrative delays 389w
Attendance allowance, Handicapped 388w
"Benefits for Disabled People" 182w
Handicap benefits, Medical examinations 387-9w
Housing benefits, Administrative delays 43w
Housing benefits, Social security appeals 42-3w
Housing benefits, Social security benefits rules 42w
Housing benefits, Social security claims 42w

Scott, Mr Nicholas—continued
Income support, Residential care 44w
Mobility allowance, Administrative delays 389w
Reduced earnings allowance, Industrial disablement benefits 389w
Reduced earnings allowance, Retirement 385w
Residential care, Elderly 182w
Severe weather payments, Social security recipients 95w
Social Fund 43-4w
Social Fund, Finance 44w
Social Fund, Publicity 43w

Scottish Agricultural Colleges Committee of Inquiry
341w

Scottish & Newcastle Breweries
251w

Scottish assembly
698

Scottish Bus Group
(30:11:88) 732
Privatisation (30:11:88) 705-19

Scottish courts
Blood tests 256w

"Scottish Health Authorities Review of Priorities for the Eighties & Nineties"
40w

Scottish health boards
Breast cancer 40-1w
Contracts for services 334-5w
Contracts of employment 334w
Nurses 118w
Pay incentives 253w
VAT 253w

"Scottish Health Service"
Costs 254w

Scottish Office
697-8
Air pollution control 255w

Scottish Transport Group
(30:11:88) 705-19
Privatisation (30:11:88) 732

Screening
AIDS 437-9w
Breast cancer 40-1w, 151-2w
Cancer 59w
Cervical cancer 142w

Sea pollution
Pollution monitoring 54w
Polychlorinated biphenyl 425w
Waste disposal 205w

Sealink
46w

Seals
Nature conservation 860
Public petitions (30:11:88) 848

Seas & oceans
Coastal protection 327w
Radioactive waste disposal 279w

Securicor
Immigrant detainees 71w

Security
Northern Ireland 122-6w

Security Service Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
1R (23:11:88) 120

Sedgemore, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 625-9

Self-regulatory system
Lloyd's of London 367w

Sellafield
240w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 287w

Sellafield—continued
Nuclear safeguards 285w

Sentencing
Criminal Justice Act 1988 72w

Service charges
Sheltered housing 282-3w

Set-aside schemes
99w, 318w
Country Landowners' Association 323w
Environment protection 318w
Take-up 318w

Settle-Carlisle railway
166-7w
Public petitions (28:11:88) 554, (29:11:88) 676-8, (30:11:88) 845-8, (02:12:88) 965

Severe weather payments
Social security recipients 95w

Severn bridge
Construction 167w
Economic situation 89w, 179-80w
Road tolls 89w, 167-8w
South Glamorgan 209w

Severn-Trent Water Authority
62-3w, 132w
Land ownership & tenure 63w

Sewage
Waste disposal 127w, 364w

Sewers
Stoke-on-Trent 62-3w

Sex discrimination
Equal pay 411w

SFA
see Small Farmers' Association

Shareholders
Councillors' interests 127w

Shares
Computer applications 366w
Satellite Information Services 250w
Takeovers 366w

Sharon Campbell Care & Aftercare Inquiry
259w

Sharpeville six
696

Shaw, Mr David
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 247
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 189-92, 213
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 255
Questions
Business statements 234
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament 220w
France 295w
Road construction, Expenditure 153w
Water authorities, Occupational pensions 65-6w

Shaw, Sir Giles
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Addresses to the crown (22:11:88) 6-10
Questions
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 882-3

Shaw, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 911-2

Sheep
326w

Sheep meat
Agricultural stabilisers 865
Common agricultural policy 866
New Zealand 864-5

Sheep premiums
205w, 324w

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 604-7

Sheltered housing
Local authorities 362w
Service charges 282-3w

Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 270-3
Questions
Agriculture, Nitrates 321-2w
UNESCO 186w

Shepherd, Mr Colin
Questions
Cathedrals, Church property 430-1
Common sheep meat regime, EC Agriculture Council 864-5
Road works 154w
Trident submarines 559

Shepherd, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 124

Shersby, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Physiology, Technicians (22:11:88) 103-6, 108
Questions
Ozone layer, International conferences 574-5

Sherwood forest
Defence land 234w

Shipping
EC action 164-5w
Ports 208w

Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
City of London (Spitalfields Market) Bill, Order to proceed in present Session (01:12:88) 929-31
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 609, 618-22

Short, Ms Clare
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 590
Questions
Baton rounds, Northern Ireland 429w
Immigration applications, Administrative delays 393w
Middle East, EC action 700

Sillars, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 24
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 163-9
Questions
Council of Ministers 291w
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Peace negotiations 695

Silver
10 Downing Street 34w

Simplified planning zones
66w

Sims, Mr Roger
Questions
Business statements 230-1, 887-8
Vietnamese refugees, Hong Kong 292w

Single European Act
304w

Sites of special scientific interest
Agriculture 135w

Skeet, Sir Trevor
Questions
EC Environment Council 199-200w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 247
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 794-5
Official Report (30:11:88) 728
Public petitions, Members' conduct (29:11:88) 676
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 27-8
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 127
Sharpeville six (23:11:88) 116
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 863
Business statements 235-6, 895
Defence land, Land values 213w
EC internal trade 307w
Trident, Costs 415w

Slaughterhouses
Northern Ireland 236w

Small Farmers' Association
325w

Smith, Mr Andrew
Questions
Agricultural research, Research finance 238w
Balance of trade 357w
EC grants & loans 269-71w
Official engagements 344w
Road traffic control, South East region 158w
Trident, Defence expenditure 222w

Smith, Mr Chris
Questions
Demonstrations, Students 75-6w, 397w
Nature Conservancy Council, Finance 281-2w, 363w
Official Secrets Act 1911, Official secrets 872
Thailand, Prerogative of mercy 107w
Thailand, Prisoners 107-8w

Smith, Sir Dudley
Questions
Business statements 890
Television, International conferences 398w

Smith, Mr Tim
Questions
British Rail 159w
Capital gains tax 187w
House of Fraser, Takeovers 102w
Iran, Foreign policy 300w
Trident 222w

Smuggling
Caribbean 691-2

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 268-70
Questions
European Security Conference, Human rights 401w
Extradition, EC Foreign Affairs Council 698

Snaith Report
(01:12:88) 959-64

Snape, Mr Peter
Questions
Manchester Airport, Railway network 421
Railway Inspectorate 161w
Transport of hazardous materials 249w
Transport of hazardous materials, A41 208w

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Questions
Air traffic control, EC action 698

Social Fund
43-4w
Community care 93-4w
Departmental correspondence 93-4w
Finance 44w
Funerals 90w
Publicity 43w

Social security
Queen's Speech (24:11:88) 241-328

Social security abuse
Greater London 367w

Social Security Advisory Committee
182w

Social security & taxation
Poverty trap 385w

Social security appeals
Housing benefits 42-3w

Social security benefits
Departmental leaflets 390-1w
One parent families 262-3w

Social security benefits rates
Family credit 392w

Social security benefits rules
Housing benefits 42w
Income support 91-2w
Pensioners 89-90w
Unemployment benefits 368w

Social security benefits uprating
Widows' benefits 414w

Social security claims
Housing benefits 42w

Social security recipients
Retirement pensions 181-2w
Severe weather payments 95w

Social structure
Students 80w

Social workers' training
Cruelty to children 6-7w
Wales 6-7w

Somalia
Chemical weapons 109w

South Africa
701-2
Arms exports 185w
Economic sanctions 293w
International Atomic Energy Agency 293w
Ministers' visits abroad 702

South Africa House
Demonstrations 701-2

South East region
Road traffic control 158w

South Eastern Education & Library Board
235-6w

South Georgia
Exclusive economic zones 307-8w

South Glamorgan
Severn bridge 209w

South of Scotland Electricity Board
283-4w

South West region
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 863
Low flying 562-3

South Yorkshire
Youth training scheme 369w

Southend-on-Sea
Commuters 166w

Southern Africa
293w
Ministers' visits abroad 293w
Peace negotiations 696-7

Southern Education & Library Board
235-6w

Southwark & Bermondsey
Employment opportunities 368w

Sowerby Bridge
Railway stations 354w

***Speaker and his deputies**, For rulings & statements see separate heading Speaker's rulings & statements*
Debates etc.
Amendments & new clauses (28:11:88) 438, (29:11:88) 579, (30:11:88) 828, (01:12:88) 936
Procedure (28:11:88) 448, 449
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 6
Questions
Business statements 894-5
Nicaragua, Overseas aid 568

Speaker's rulings & statements
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 239-40, 248, 251, 260, 261, 273, 274
Business questions (24:11:88) 232-4, (01:12:88) 889
Calling of Members (22:11:88) 101, (23:11:88) 179, (29:11:88) 577, 578, (30:11:88) 712, (01:12:88) 900
House of Commons debates (30:11:88) 803
House of Commons procedure (23:11:88) 114, (30:11:88) 779
Leader of the Opposition (01:12:88) 900
Lobbying (24:11:88) 239-40, 248, 251, 260, 261, 273, 274
Members' conduct (28:11:88) 524, 525, 526, (29:11:88) 573, 676, (30:11:88) 695-6
Members' facilities (28:11:88) 437
Members' interventions (22:11:88) 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 29, (23:11:88) 168, (24:11:88) 247, (25:11:88) 401, (28:11:88) 462, 465, 466, (29:11:88) 584, 585, 587, 588, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, (30:11:88) 712
Members' misconduct (30:11:88) 728, 729, 730, 731, 732
Members' relatives (22:11:88) 70
Members' speeches (23:11:88) 116, 117, 118, (24:11:88) 241, 315, (25:11:88) 335, 373, (28:11:88) 438, 484, (29:11:88) 629, (30:11:88) 769, 793, (01:12:88) 911
Ministerial speeches (30:11:88) 709
Ministerial statements (23:11:88) 115
Official Report (29:11:88) 581, 583, (30:11:88) 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, (01:12:88) 897-8, 899
Oral questions (29:11:88) 568
Parliamentary privilege (23:11:88) 220
Points of order (23:11:88) 127, (25:11:88) 365, (29:11:88) 568, (01:12:88) 895-6
Prime Minister's questions (01:12:88) 870, 873
Private Members' motions (30:11:88) 733
Private notice questions (25:11:88) 361, 362, (01:12:88) 876, 884, 901
Public petitions (30:11:88) 846
Scope of debate (22:11:88) 100, 101, 102, (23:11:88) 111, 112, (24:11:88) 312, (01:12:88) 930, 931, 938, (02:12:88) 1005, 1018
Sub judice (24:11:88) 236, (30:11:88) 722-7
Supplementary questions (29:11:88) 561, 577, 578, (30:11:88) 696, (01:12:88) 871-2
Ten minutes rule (28:11:88) 438, 484
Unparliamentary expressions (23:11:88) 224, (28:11:88) 490, (29:11:88) 660, 661, (01:12:88) 870, 894, 900

Spearing, Mr Nigel

***Spearing, Mr Nigel**—continued*
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 247
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 804
Private notice question intervention (25:11:88) 364-5
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 341, 342, 347-8
Summertime, EC action (01:12:88) 936, 942-8, 953, 956-7
Questions
Council of Ministers 291w
European Council 178w
General Medical Council 364-5w
London Regional Transport, Finance 426
Pornography, EC countries 402w
Public order policing, Students 174-6w

Special education
Bromley 352-3w

Speed governors
407w

Speed limits
Cameras 407w
Lorries 407w
Motorways 156w
Rural areas 163w

Speedlink
7-8w

Speller, Mr Tony
Questions
Insulation grants 284w
Nuclear power stations, Radioactive waste disposal 283-4w

Spicer, Sir Jim
Questions
European Court of Human Rights, Judgments 573

***Spicer, Mr Michael**, Under-Secretary of State for Energy*
Questions
Coal mining, Subsidence 341w
Electricity meters 341w
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 341-2w
Electricity tariffs, Privatisation 342w
Energy research, Air pollution 125-6w
Energy research, Research finance 125w
EURATOM, Nuclear safeguards 285w
Hinkley Point C, Public inquiries 285w
Nuclear accidents, Civil liability 286w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Dounreay 126w
Nuclear fuels, Nuclear reactors 286w
Nuclear power stations, Electricity tariffs 287w
Nuclear power stations, Radioactive waste disposal 283-4w
Nuclear safeguards, International Atomic Energy Agency 284-5w
Nuclear safeguards, Sellafield 285w
Plutonium, Transport of radioactive materials 287w
Power stations, Construction 287w
Radioactive waste disposal, International Atomic Energy Agency 284w
War casualties, Cremation 47w

Spokes Committee
see Sharon Campbell Care & Aftercare Inquiry

Squire, Mr Robin
Questions
Gibraltar, Homosexuality 185w
Homosexuality, Judgments 393-4w
Homosexuality, Law reform 394w
Lorries, Road accidents 407w, 409w
Lorries, Speed limits 407w
National Rivers Authority 424w
Public transport, Greater London 426
Speed limits, Cameras 407w

SSEB
see South of Scotland Electricity Board

Stafford Prison
243w

Stanbrook, Mr Ivor
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 185-7
Questions
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 878-9

Standards enforcement
River pollution 134-5w

Standards specifications
Motor vehicle registration 356w

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel, Railway network (02:12:88) 1022-3
Questions
Channel tunnel, Private sector 53w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 53w
Development aid, National income 68-9w
Mozambique, Overseas aid 68w
Overseas aid, Costs 69w
Vietnam, Overseas aid 68w

Steel, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 969
Questions
Palestine Liberation Organisation, UN General Assembly 690
South Africa, Arms exports 185w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Questions
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 278w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Questions
International cooperation, Explosives 218w

Stern, Mr Michael
Questions
Baltic republics of USSR, Foreign policy 184w
European fighter aircraft 566-7
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, Takeovers 253w
Official engagements 178w, 344w
Ports, Roads 165w

Stevens, Mr Lewis
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Disease control 241w
Set-aside schemes, Take-up 318w

Stewart, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 708
Questions
European Parliament constituencies, Scotland 183w

Stewart, Mr Andy
Debates etc.
Public petitions, Settle-Carlisle railway (30:11:88) 846
Questions
Army strength 264-5w
Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Association, Government grants 260w
Road accidents, Casualties 156-7w
USA 287w

***Stewart, Mr Ian**, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Questions
Baton rounds, Northern Ireland 429w
Community policing, Strangford 351w
Police stations, Ards peninsula 428w
Road accidents, Down 428w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Recruitment 120w

Stewart, Mr Ian—continued
Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast, Criminal damage 236w
Schizophrenia, Mentally disturbed offenders 121w, 235w
Security, Northern Ireland 122-6w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 430w
Theft, Greyabbey 428w

Stoke-on-Trent
63w
Sewers 62-3w

Stokes, Sir John
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 59-62
Questions
EC law 699

Stone Hospital
Property transfer 260w

Stoney Cross
A31 165w

Strang, Mr Gavin
Debates etc.
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (29:11:88) 577
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 715
Questions
AIDS, Screening 437-8w
Cruise missiles, Nuclear disarmament 219w
European fighter aircraft 415w

Strangford
Community policing 351w

Straw, Mr Jack
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 659
Questions
Higher education, Age participation rates 83-4w
Student loans 404-5w

Stray dogs
Local authority powers 362w

Structure plans
Cambridgeshire (28:11:88) 555-8

Student grants
78w
Expenditure 77-8w, 353w
Overseas students 351-2w

Student loans
77-8w, 404-5w
Costs 353w
Demonstrations 174-6w
Private rented housing 77w

Student numbers
Higher education 81-2w
Overseas students 352w
Universities 79-80w

Student Support Review
353w
Evidence 353w

Student Unions Review
353w
Civil service manpower 353-4w

Students
Community charge 339w
Demonstrations 75-6w, 397w
Public order policing 174-6w, 395-7w
Rent allowances 412-3w
Social structure 80w

Sub judice
Speaker's rulings & statements (24:11:88) 236, (30:11:88) 722-7

Submarines
Fishing vessels 216w

Subsidence
Coal mining 341w

Sudan
Human rights 308w

Sugar beet
Lorries 157w

Sumberg, Mr David
Questions
Nuclear weapons, Modernisation 229w

Summerson, Mr Hugo
Questions
"Benefits for Disabled People" 182w

Summertime
EC action (01:12:88) 936-58

Supplementary questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (29:11:88) 561, 577, 578, (30:11:88) 696, (01:12:88) 871-2

Supply Estimates
Intelligence services 104w

Sylvan High School Croydon
City technology colleges 402w

Takeovers
Efficiency scrutinies 102w
House of Fraser 102w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission 251w, 253w
Redundancy 102w
Shares 366w

Tanks
104w, 226w
Defence contracts 104w
Defence orocurement 414w, 564
Expenditure 231w

Tax allowances
Forestry 48w

Tax evasion
Civil service manpower 105-6w

Tax harmonisation
Excise duties 67w

Tax reform
Personal tax allowances 186-7w

Tax yields
Mortgage relief 104w

Taylor, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Settle-Carlisle railway, Public petitions (29:11:88) 676-7
Questions
Water authorities, Land ownership & tenure 425w
Water authorities, Vacant land 362w
Water supply industry, Land 425w

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 647-9
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 340, 397
Questions
Jamaica, Overseas aid 568
Security, Northern Ireland 122-6w

Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Questions
Community policing, Strangford 351w
European monetary system 572
Overseas students, Student grants 351-2w
Overseas students, Student numbers 352w
Police stations, Ards peninsula 428w
Road accidents, Down 428w
Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast, Criminal damage 236w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 430w

Taylor, Rt Hon John David—continued
Theft, Greyabbey 428w

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Debates etc.
Public petitions, Council housing (30:11:88) 846
Public petitions, Settle-Carlisle railway (30:11:88) 846-7
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 536-9
Questions
Employment discrimination, Age 273w
Exhaust emission controls 160-1w
Fisheries, Cornwall 321w
Low flying, South West region 562-3
Pakistan 315w
Planning permission, Town & Country Planning General Development Order 1977 133w
Post Office Users' National Council 253w

Taylor, Mr Teddy
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 842-3
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 816-7, 823
Summertime, EC action (01:12:88) 936-40, 946, 958
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 531
Questions
Business statements 889
Butter, New Zealand 100w
Common agricultural policy, EC reform 320w
Commuters, Southend-on-Sea 166w
Food surpluses, Food prices 67w
Palestine, Recognition of states 184w
Tax harmonisation, Excise duties 67w

Teacher training
Recruitment 10w

Teachers
Armed forces civilians 233-4w
Recruitment 19w
West Germany 233-4w

Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 603, 607-11, 660

Technical Drawing Review Group
39w

Technical education
Scotland 39w

Technicians
Pay (22:11:88) 103-10
Physiology (22:11:88) 103-10

Telephone charges
British Approvals Board for Telecommunications 9w

Telephone services
Advertising controls 169w

Television
73-4w
Broadcasting controls 72-3w
International conferences 398w

Temporary immigrants
Immigration controls 246w

10 Downing Street
345w
Expenditure 345w
Labour Party 346w
Press 34w
Silver 34w

Ten minutes rule
Speaker's rulings & statements (28:11:88) 438, 484

Tenancy agreements
Brewing industry 868

Territorial Army
Armed forces recruitment 224w
Army strength 231-2w

Terrorism
Candidates (24:11:88) 238
Northern Ireland (24:11:88) 238, 430w

Testing
Electronic surveillance 410-1w

TGWU
see Transport & General Workers' Union

Thailand
Prerogative of mercy 107w
Prisoners 107-8w

***Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret**, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 19-28
Questions
Air pollution control, Government departments 178w
Arms control 248w
Balance of trade 571-2, 574
Birmingham 177w
Cathedrals, Government assistance 576
Central Policy Review Staff, Costs 345-6w
Clay, Trevor, Public appointments 346w
Climate, Air pollution 247-8w
Defence, USA 34w
Design 67-8w
Energy conservation, Lighting 248w
Espionage, USSR 344w
European Commission, Public appointments 343w
European Council 178w
European Court of Human Rights, Judgments 573
European monetary system 572
Extradition, Crown Prosecution Service 869
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick 871-2
Food surpluses, Food prices 67w
Government contracts, Economic League 67w
Guided weapons, USA 34w
Hexham 343w
Ministerial changes 178w
Ministers' visits abroad, Expenditure 347w
Ministers' visits abroad, Mass media 345w
Ministers' visits abroad, Poland 35w, 247w
Ministers' visits abroad, USA 35w
Mortgages 575-6
Nuclear non proliferation 248-9w
Nuclear test ban 248-9w
Nurses, Industrial disputes 573-4
Official engagements 178w, 343-4w
Official gifts, Reagan, Ronald 346w
Official gifts, USA 35w
Official Secrets Act 1911, Official secrets 872
Ozone layer, International conferences 574-5
Palestine Liberation Organisation, Recognition of states 873-4
Parents, School governors 872
Postal services, Private sector 871
Prime Minister, Accounting 345w
Prime Minister, Expenditure 345w
Prime Minister, Ministerial policy advisors 344w
Privatisation, Costs 343w
Public appointments, Professional qualifications 344w
Retail price index, Mortgage interest rates 869-71
Ryan, Patrick, Extradition 572-3
Tax harmonisation, Excise duties 67w
10 Downing Street, Expenditure 345w
10 Downing Street, Labour Party 346w
10 Downing Street, Press 34w
10 Downing Street, Silver 34w
Unemployment, Bexley 574
Waldheim, Kurt, Nazi war crimes 346w
Winterborne Zelstone 343w

Theatre nuclear weapons
NATO 218w
West Germany 230-1w

Theft
Greyabbey 428w

Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Questions
Arms control 248w, 307w
Chemical weapons, USSR 265w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Air pollution control 277w
Climate, Air pollution 247-8w
Defence, West Germany 231w, 266w
Defence procurement, USSR 265w
Electric lighting, Energy conservation 286w
Energy conservation, Lighting 248w
EURATOM, Nuclear safeguards 285w
European Proliferation Information Centre, Nuclear safeguards 310-1w
Hinkley Point C, Public inquiries 285w
Honey, Food contamination 240w
House of Commons questions, Costs 285-6w
INF Treaty, Nuclear disarmament 265-6w
Leukaemia, Child health 255w
Meteorological Office, Civil service agencies 265w
Ministers' visits abroad, Poland 247w
Nitrogen oxides, Air pollution control 278-9w
Nuclear accidents, Civil liability 286w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Environment 279w
Nuclear fuels, Nuclear reactors 286w
Nuclear non proliferation 248-9w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, International conferences 309-10w
Nuclear power stations, Electricity tariffs 287w
Nuclear safeguards, Inquiries 310w
Nuclear safeguards, International Atomic Energy Agency 284-5w
Nuclear safeguards, Sellafield 285w
Nuclear test ban 248-9w
Ozone layer, Science & technology research 280w
Plutonium, Transport of radioactive materials 287w
Radioactive waste disposal 279w
Radioactive waste disposal, International Atomic Energy Agency 284w
Radioactive waste disposal, Radioactive wastes 280w
Radioactive waste disposal, Seas & oceans 279w
Radioactive wastes, Costs 279w
Radioactivity, Irish Sea 240w
South Africa, International Atomic Energy Agency 293w
Uranium, Imports 265w
Warsaw Pact, Armed forces 265w

***Thompson, Mr Donald**, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture*
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 844-5
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 912, 913, 923-7
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 822-4
Questions
Animal feed, Trading standards departments 321w
Animals, Cremation 57w
Beef premiums 205w
Bovine somatotropin, Agricultural research 325w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 324-5w, 863-4
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Compensation 324w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Food contamination 862-3
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, South West region 863
British Veterinary Association 319w
British Wool Marketing Board 317-8w
Butter, EC external trade 239w
Cereals, Intervention stocks 56w
Common sheep meat regime 95w, 240w, 323w
EC Fisheries Council 205-6w, 327w
Export rebates, Food industry 425w

Thompson, Mr Donald—continued
Fish, Tributyl tin 326w
Fisheries, Cornwall 321w
Fisheries, EC grants & loans 97w
Fisheries, Marine animals 860
Fisheries, North Sea 329w
Fishing vessels, Licensing 204w
Food industry, Export rebates 239w
Lobsters, Fish conservation 237w
Marine animals, Fishing vessels 324w
Milk, Production 317w
Milk Marketing Board 96w, 323-4w
Radioactivity, Irish Sea 240w
Sea pollution, Pollution monitoring 34w
Sea pollution, Waste disposal 205w
Sheep 326w
Sheep premiums 324w
Torry research station 325w
Warble fly, Pest control 238-9w

Thompson, Mr Jack
Questions
Nuclear disarmament 221w

Thompson, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 766
Questions
GATT, USA 328w
Gurkhas 231w
Warsaw Pact, Armed forces 227w

Thornton, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Charities, Management 2w

Thurnham, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Intelligence services, Inquiries (23:11:88) 220
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 178, 196-9
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 249
Questions
Blood Products Laboratory, Factor VIII 440w
Business statements 235
Civil service dispersal 412w
Companies Registration Office (England & Wales) 405w
Defence contracts, North West region 233w
Locums, Fees & charges 57w
Members' facilities, Palace of Westminster 431-2
Road construction, North West region 425
USSR, Human rights 184-5w

Tidy Britain Group
64-5w

Tied housing
Prison staff 172w, 393w

Titanium dioxide
199-200w

Tobacco industry
Factory closures 366w
Redundancy 366w

Torbay Borough Council
Council housing (30:11:88) 846

Tornado aircraft
Modernisation 104w

Torry research station
325w

Tourism
110w
Antarctic 333w
English Tourist Board 110-1w

Tourism Review Committee
110w, 369w

Tourist industry
369w

Town & Country Planning General Development Order 1977
Questions
Planning permission 133w

Townend, Mr John
Debates etc.
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 908

Townsend, Mr Cyril D
Questions
Rescue services, Helicopters 219w

Trade Union & Labour Relations Act 1974
Questions
Picketing 273w

Trade union membership
Government Communications
Headquarters 303w

Trade unions
COD Donnington 221w
Conservative Party 397w

Trading standards departments
Animal feed 321w

Training
Audiology technicians 197w
Bradford Resource Centre 111-2w

Training allowances
272-3w

Training Commission
(30:11:88) 732

Transferable allowances
186-7w

Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988
Questions
201w

Transport
Channel tunnel 155w
Greater London 52-3w, 415

Transport & General Workers' Union
319w

Transport infrastructure
EC action (28:11:88) 531-54

Transport of hazardous materials
201w, 249w
A41 208w
Export controls 201w
Import controls 201-2w

Transport of radioactive materials
Plutonium 287w

Transport (Scotland) Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
1R (30:11:88) 732

Travel restrictions
Hooliganism 410w

Treasury
Air pollution control 358w

Treaties
Animal welfare 398-9w
Cultural relations 106-7w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Questions
Angola, Armed forces deployment 696
Armed forces, USSR 220w
British Rail, Investment 160w
M1, Road traffic 419

Tributyl tin
Fish 326w

Trident
Arms control negotiations 560
Costs 415w
Defence expenditure 222w, 559-60

Trident missiles
Arms control negotiations 562

Trident submarines
559
Defence contracts 222w

Trippier, Mr David, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment
Questions
Bed & breakfast accommodation 360-1w
Community trusts 133w
Community trusts, Government grants to local authorities 133w
Council house sales, Nottingham 131w
Housing action trusts, Nottingham 62w
Housing construction, Greater London 5w
Housing Corporation, Finance 202w
Multiple occupation, Domestic safety 361w
National mobility scheme, Private rented housing 361w
Rent arrears, Local authorities 361w
Right to buy, London boroughs 274w
Sheltered housing, Local authorities 362w
Sheltered housing, Service charges 282-3w
Warrington & Runcorn Development Corporation 202w

Turkey
Human rights 301w
Overseas aid 14w, 317w

Turner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 493-4
Questions
British Rail 159w
Business statements 237-8
Death grants 90w
El Salvador, Human rights 295w
Ministry of Defence, Land values 570

Twinn, Dr Ian
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 169-72
Questions
Housing construction, Greater London 5w
Independent European Programme Group 225w
Road construction, Environment 164w
USA 297w

Tyre tread depths
417

UEA
see East Anglia University

UKAEA
see United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

UN
see United Nations

UN environment programme
5-6w

UN General Assembly
293-4w, 689
Palestine Liberation Organisation 689-91, 695

UN Secretariat
294w

UN Security Council
(25:11:88) 335-406
Kampuchea 292-3w

Unemployment
Bexley 574
Bradford 112w
Clwyd 47-8w
Cumbria 113-4w
EC grants & loans 45w
Intermediate areas 45w
Lancashire 113-4w
Norfolk 114w
Regional planning & development 45w
Rural areas 367w
Statistics 272w

Unemployment benefit offices
111-2w

Unemployment benefits
Coventry 387w
Fraud 367w

Unemployment benefits—continued
Social security benefits rules 368w

UNESCO
186w

UNITA
Angola 288w

United Arab Emirates
Ministers' visits abroad 297-8w

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
126w

United Nations
109w, 293-4w, 300w
Baltic republics of USSR 306w
Children's rights 185w
Rain forests 303w

Universal Declaration of Human Rights
300w

Universities
Student numbers 79-80w

University of Ulster
352w

University of Wales
88-9w

University teachers
Occupational pensions 177w

Unparliamentary expressions
Speaker's rulings & statements (23:11:88) 224, (28:11:88) 490, (29:11:88) 660, 661, (01:12:88) 870, 894, 900

Uranium
Imports 265w

Urban development grants
Hotels 199w

USA
287w, 297w
Central America 306w
Defence 34w, 227w
Foreign policy 297w, 701
GATT 328w
Guided weapons 34w
Middle East 301w
Military aircraft 213w
Ministers' visits abroad 35w, 108w
Motor vehicles 169w
NATO 700-1
Official gifts 35w

Uspensky, Slava
USSR 107w

USSR
294w
Afghanistan 295w
Armed forces 220w
Chemical weapons 217w, 265w
Cultural relations 106w, 305w
Defence procurement 265w
Emigration 109w
Espionage 344w
Foreign policy 294w
Human rights 108w, 184-5w, 289-90w, 308w, 401w, 703-4
Lein, Alex 66w
Samoilovich, George 303w
Uspensky, Slava 107w
Visas 308w

Vacancies
Audiology technicians 196-7w
Departmental correspondence 113w
Health service staff 60w
Nurses 60w
Pharmacists 437w

Vacant land
Water authorities 362w

VAT
Construction 267-8w
Defence equipment 359w

VAT—continued
Health centres 336w
NHS 267w
Scottish health boards 253w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Questions
Business statements 890-1
India, British embassies 304w

Vehicle Inspectorate
211-2w

Vietnam
Overseas aid 68w

Vietnamese refugees
Hong Kong 291-2w, 331w, 401w
Resettlement, 185w, 394-5w, 401w

***Viggers, Mr Peter**, Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Questions
Beef, Northern Ireland 429-30w
Beef premiums, Northern Ireland 427-8w
Harland & Wolff, Privatisation 46w
Slaughterhouses, Northern Ireland 236w

Visas
British embassies 308-10w
EC action 36-7w
USSR 308w

Vocational guidance
School leaving 112w

Voluntary organisations
Hearing aids 195w
Mental illness 142w

Voluntary work
Nature conservation 424w

Voting methods
Antarctic Treaty 333w

Wakefield
EC grants & loans (29:11:88) 679-86

Wakefield Prison
Church services 74w

***Wakeham, Rt Hon John**, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons*
Debates etc.
By election writs, Epping Forest (23:11:88) 112-3
Explosions, ROF Burghfield (02:12:88) 1033
House of Commons procedure (30:11:88) 763-9, 802-3
Official Report (30:11:88) 730
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 966-70
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 663-8
Questions
Business statements 227-38, 885-96
European Parliament Members, Palace of Westminster 434
General Medical Council 364-5w
House of Commons chamber, Lighting 365w
Lobbying, Access to Parliament 365w
Members, Postal services 95w
Members' facilities, Facsimile transmission 434-5
Members' facilities, Palace of Westminster 431-2, 434
Palace of Westminster, Press releases 431
Parliamentary broadcasting, Journalists 432-3
Private Members' Bills, House of Commons procedure 433

***Waldegrave, Mr William**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Algeria, Civil disorder 308w

Waldegrave, Mr William—continued
Antarctic, Tourism 333w
Antarctic Treaty, Voting methods 333w
Arms control 307w
Baltic republics of USSR 305w
Baltic republics of USSR, Foreign policy 184w
Baltic republics of USSR, United Nations 306w
British Council, Arts finance 330-2w
Diamond, Rt Hon Lord, Newspaper press 401w
Eastern Europe, Human rights 302w
European Proliferation Information Centre, Nuclear safeguards 310-1w
European Security Conference 702-3
European Security Conference, Human rights 401w
Government Communications Headquarters, Trade union membership 303w
Guatemala, Warships 333-4w
Gulf states, Foreign policy 298w
Gulf states, Ministers' visits abroad 299w
Immigration applications 311-4w
Iran, Foreign policy 300w
Iran, Political prisoners 315w, 701
Iran-Iraq war, Peace negotiations 701
Iraq, Chemical weapons 301-2w
Israel 294w
Israel, Occupied territories 303w
Kurdistan 299w
Kurdistan, Human rights 66w
Kurdistan, Iraq 299-300w
Lebanon, Hostages 300w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 109w, 301w
Middle East, USA 301w
Military decorations, Medals 402w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, International conferences 309-10w
Nuclear safeguards, Inquiries 310w
Palestine, Recognition of states 184w
Palestine Liberation Organisation 298w
Poland, Foreign policy 302-3w
Qatar 300-1w
Romania, Cornea, Doina 334w
Sudan, Human rights 308w
United Arab Emirates, Ministers' visits abroad 297-8w
USSR 294w
USSR, Cultural relations 305w
USSR, Emigration 109w
USSR, Foreign policy 294w
USSR, Human rights 184-5w, 289-90w, 308w, 703-4
USSR, Lein, Alex 66w
USSR, Samoilovich, George 303w
USSR, Uspensky, Slava 107w
USSR, Visas 308w
Vietnamese refugees, Hong Kong 331w, 401w
Vietnamese refugees, Resettlement 401w
Wallenberg, Raoul 401w
Western European Union 304w

Walden, Mr George
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 83-6

Waldheim, Kurt
Nazi war crimes 264w, 346w

Wales
Channel tunnel 418w
Council house rents 242w
Defence procurement 568-9
Elderly 180w
Geriatric patients 180-1w
Housing 47w
Local government expenditure 6w
Mental health community care 88w
Mental health services 87-8w
Mental hospitals 87w
Nurses 242-4w, 348w
Pharmacists 179w
Planning appeals 416-8w
Planning permission 241-2w
Psychiatric nurses 88w
Roads 416w

Wales—continued
Schizophrenia 85-8w
Social workers' training 6-7w

Walker, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 711
Summertime, EC action (01:12:88) 941, 949-50, 956
Questions
Nurses, Career structure 340-2w
Rescue services, RAF Leuchars 219w

***Walker, Rt Hon Peter**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Questions
Channel tunnel, Wales 418w
Cruelty to children, Social workers' training 6-7w
Local government expenditure, Wales 6w
Nurses, Career structure 242-4w, 348w
Planning appeals, National parks 417w
Planning appeals, Wales 416-8w
Unemployment, Clwyd 47-8w

Wall, Mr Pat
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 649-51
Questions
Nuclear weapons, Modernisation 217w

Wallace, Mr James
Debates etc.
Fisheries, EC action (01:12:88) 904, 912-4, 926
Questions
Business statements 230, 887
Fishing vessels, Licensing 204w
Government Communications Headquarters, Trade union membership 303w
Income tax assessment, Postal deliveries 48w
Inflation 271w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Dounreay 118w, 126w
Railway electrification, Railway network 154w
Tanks 226w

Wallenberg, Raoul
401w

Waller, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
Public petitions, Settle-Carlisle railway (30:11:88) 847
Questions
British Wool Marketing Board 317-8w
Lorries, Axle weights 157-8w

Walley, Ms Joan
Questions
Carbon monoxide, Air pollution 277w
Chlorofluorocarbons, EC countries 276-7w
Energy research, Air pollution control 275w
Exhaust emissions 276w
Methane, Air pollution 276w
Military aircraft, USA 213w
River pollution, Standards enforcement 134-5w
Sewage, Waste disposal 364w
Telephone services, Advertising controls 169w

Walters, Sir Dennis
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 377-9

Wandsworth
Roads 162w

War casualties
Cemeteries 51-2w, 203-4w
Civil defence 37w
Cremation 47w
Environmental health 61w

War casualties—continued
Food contamination 57w
NATO Civil Defence Committee 37w
War graves 52w
Water pollution 138w

War graves
War casualties 52w

Warble fly
Pest control 238-9w

Ward, Mr John
Questions
Animal feed, Trading standards departments 321w
Bovine somatotropin, Licensing 97w
Roads, Deer 160w
Saudi Arabia, Defence 227-8w

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 191
Queen's Speech, Social security (24:11:88) 242
Transport infrastructure, EC action (28:11:88) 544, 547-9
Questions
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Drug side effects 148-9w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Finance 147-8w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Manpower 149w
Committee on Safety of Medicines, Public appointments 149-50w

Warren, Mr Kenneth
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Environment (28:11:88) 468-70
Questions
Air safety, Airmisses 52w
Hotels, Urban development grants 199w
Tourism, English Tourist Board 110-1w
VAT, Defence equipment 359w

Warrington & Runcorn Development Corporation
202w

Warrington Health Authority
440-1w

Warsaw Pact
(25:11:88) 335-406
Armed forces 227w, 265w

Warships
Guatemala 333-4w

Waste disposal
Farms 323w
Hospitals 191-2w
Law reform 4-5w, 360w
Privatisation 62w
Sea pollution 205w
Sewage 127w, 364w

Water authorities
External financing limits 130w
Land ownership & tenure 425w
Occupational pensions 65-6w
Privatisation (23:11:88) 119-20
Public appointments 128-30w
Vacant land 362w

Water Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
1R (23:11:88) 119-20

Water pollution
EC law 138w
Ground water 424w
Industrial wastes 137w
National Rivers Authority 134w
Nottingham 131w
Pesticides 136w
War casualties 138w

Water supply
Lead pollution 364w

Water supply disconnections
280w

Water supply industry
132w
Bye laws 134w
Land 425w

Watts, Mr John
Questions
Bookmakers, Office of Fair Trading 170w
Horserace Totalisator Board, Privatisation 409-10w
Satellite Information Services, Shares 250w
Water authorities, External financing limits 130w

"Way Forward"
Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive 202w

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Summertime, EC action (01:12:88) 941-2, 949
Questions
Council of Ministers 291w

Welsh, Mr Michael
Questions
Lindholme Prison, Public sector housing sales 397w
Prison staff, Public sector housing sales 397w

Welsh Grand Committee
Queen's Speech (28:11:88) 554

Welsh Office
Air pollution control 242w

West Germany
Cars 170w
Defence 231w, 266w
Government assistance to industry 103w
Teachers 233-4w
Theatre nuclear weapons 230-1w

West Midlands
Roads 158-9w

Western European Union
225-6w, 304w

Westland Helicopters
224w
Defence procurement 232w

Westminster bridge
Police 396w

WEU
see Western European Union

Wheeler, Mr John
Questions
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Recruitment 120w
USSR, Human rights 108w

Whitley councils
Appeals 253w
Scotland 253w

Whitney, Mr Ray
Questions
Nurses, Industrial disputes 361
Warsaw Pact, Armed forces 227w

Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Debates etc.
Channel tunnel, Railway network (02:12:88) 1019-22, 1028, 1030
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 989-91, 1003
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 176-9
Questions
Army, Intimidation 223-4w

Widdecombe, Miss Ann—continued
Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members, Public appointments 12w
Drinking & driving, Alcoholism 355w
Intimidation, Armed forces 349w
Intimidation, Bassingbourn barracks 349w
Merchant seamen, Certification 355-6w

Widows' benefits
Armed forces pensions 227w
Social security benefits uprating 414w

Wigley, Mr Dafydd
Questions
Council house rents, Wales 242w
Defence procurement, Wales 568-9
Hospitals, Gwynedd 87w
Housing, Wales 47w
Privatisation, Income 270w

Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981
Questions
Rights of way 421w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Questions
Alarm missiles 566
Chile, Elections 693

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Extradition, Ryan, Patrick (30:11:88) 725
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 1002, 1005-11
Royal family, State visits (23:11:88) 116-7

Williams, Mr Alan W
Questions
IRA, Gibraltar 216w
Small Farmers' Association 325w

Williams Committee
see Scottish Agricultural Colleges Committee of Inquiry

Wilshire, Mr David
Debates etc.
Local government services, Management (02:12:88) 1034-7
Parliamentary buildings, House of Commons accommodation (02:12:88) 984-9, 998-9, 1000-1
Religious cults, Palace of Westminster (28:11:88) 437, (29:11:88) 577
Questions
Business statements 891
EC Internal Market Council 252-3w

Wilson, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 602
Queen's Speech, Intelligence services (23:11:88) 165
Scottish Transport Group, Privatisation (30:11:88) 719
Questions
Business statements 236
Income support, Dumfries & Galloway 413w
Members' correspondence 391w

Wilson of Rievaulx, Rt Hon Lord
(23:11:88) 218-26

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Access to Parliament (24:11:88) 260
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 34, 65-70, 73-4
Royal family, State visits (23:11:88) 117, 118
Questions
Balance of trade 571-2
Business statements 236-7
Ministers' visits abroad, Expenditure 347w
Parliamentary broadcasting, Journalists 432-3

Winterborne Zelstone
343w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Butter, New Zealand (30:11:88) 827
Milk, Production quotas (30:11:88) 815
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Common sheep meat regime 866
Government assistance to industry, West Germany 103w
Southern Africa, Peace negotiations 697
Zimbabwe, Harrington, Odile 109w

Wise, Mrs Audrey
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 38-41, 71
Questions
Central America, USA 306w

Women
Doctors 387-8w
Health service staff 61-2w

Women's employment
Day care of children 383w

Women's Farmers' Union
327w, 861

Women's prisons
Day nurseries 243-4w

Wood, Mr Timothy
Questions
Defence procurement, Cost effectiveness 217w

Woodcock, Mr Mike
Questions
Coal mining, Subsidence 341w

Woolwich
Ministry of Defence 414w

Woolwich Arsenal
Property development 350w

Work permits
370w

World Bank
Foreign aid 70w

Worthington, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 631-3
Questions
Fiji, Foreign policy 296w

Worthington, Mr Tony—continued
Intermediate treatment, Government grants 58w
Marine animals, Fishing vessels 324w
Retirement pensions, Housing benefits 391-2w

Wray, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 97-8w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Food contamination 98w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Scotland 118w
Energy research, Research finance 125w
Mergers, Efficiency scrutinies 102w
Mergers, Redundancy 102w
National Rivers Authority, Public appointments 133w
National Rivers Authority, Water pollution 134w
Passport Office, Civil service manpower 72w
Royal Ordnance Defence procurement 228w
Tax evasion, Civil service manpower 105-6w
Television 73-4w
Television, Broadcasting controls 72-3w
Water supply industry 132w

Yellow card scheme
148-9w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Official Report (30:11:88) 726
Queen's Speech (22:11:88) 32
Queen's Speech, Economic situation (29:11:88) 580, 581-2
Questions
Buses, Road damage 420
Common agricultural policy, Expenditure 319-20w
Hong Kong 297w
Manufactured goods, Balance of trade 253w
Official engagements 178w
Warsaw Pact, Armed forces 227w

Yorkshire & Humberside
River pollution 135-6w

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority
380w

Yorkshire Water Authority
River pollution 135w

Young, Mr David
Questions
Accident & emergency departments, Death 262w
Patients' transport, Helicopters 145w

Young people
Income support 92w

"Young People's Guide to Social Security"
Bradford 390-1w

***Younger, Rt Hon George**, Secretary of State for Defence*
Debates etc.
Queen's Speech, Foreign policy (25:11:88) 399, 400-6
Questions
Jamaica, Overseas aid 568
NATO 220w
NATO Nuclear Planning Group 219w, 571
Royal Ordnance 564
Royal Ordnance, Defence contracts 563-4
Royal Ordnance, Defence procurement 228w, 563
Trident 222w
Trident, Arms control negotiations 560
Trident, Defence expenditure 559-60
Trident submarines 559
Trident submarines, Defence contracts 222w

Youth employment
(30:11:88) 732

Youth training scheme
369w
Clothing industry 272-3w
Handicapped 370w
South Yorkshire 369w
Take-up 369w

Zimbabwe
Harrington, Odile 109w